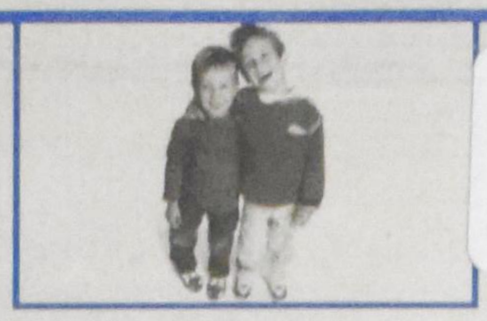
Orange juice
PAGE 8

The ultimate outsider
PAGE 10



Resolving to love
PAGE 15

The raw milk debate
PAGE 20

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A Reformed Biweekly | 66th Year of Publication | January 23, 2012 | NO. 2929| $2.50

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CHRISTIAN COURIER

What is the most important issue currently facing the Reformed tradition?

We asked eight CRC pastors, chaplains and professors to reflect on this question. Their answers are printed on pages 1-3.

A reason to exist

Syd Hielema

I believe the most important issue facing the Reformed tradition is this: do we still have a reason to exist as a distinct Christian tradition? The answer: "Yes, but…."

1. Yes, we have a reason to exist.

Our way of reading Scripture as the story of creation-fall-redemption-consummation gives us a powerful lens for discerning the intersection between God's faithfulness and human response in a complicated world. This lens helps us to navigate the fine line between the (broadly speaking) evangelical and mainline Christian traditions. We can challenge the evangelical tendency to be simplistic and over-spiritualize complex issues. We can also question the mainline tendency to compromise central Biblical teachings. Our tradition has a sturdy, whole-life grittiness about it that can draw (for example) from angry Psalms of lament, Paul's confusing words about gender and the wild visions of Revelation to grow a vision for faithful following in a confusing world. We have the tools for exploring difficult issues in wise ways, issues like social justice, environmental stewardship, evolution, homosexuality, international development, worship and more.

We've accepted the cultural tendency to make our lives far too busy, and a community that is too busy has trouble finding the reflective space to distinguish itself from cultural trends.

2. But, there's a challenge.

I'm not sure that we have the desire to use this gift. Three factors undermine this desire: First, this way of reading Scripture requires a deep integration of heart, head and hand, and we tend to focus either too much on the head or react against that focus and downplay the role of our thinking. Second, as a community we've accepted the cultural tendency to make our lives far too busy, and a community that is too busy has trouble finding the reflective space to distinguish itself from cultural trends. Third, our digital age provides instant answers for everything, and a thoughtful and nuanced Reformed approach doesn't fare well when we become accustomed to immediate results.

Is there hope?

In my role as chaplain at Redeemer University College, I provide guidance to students, professors

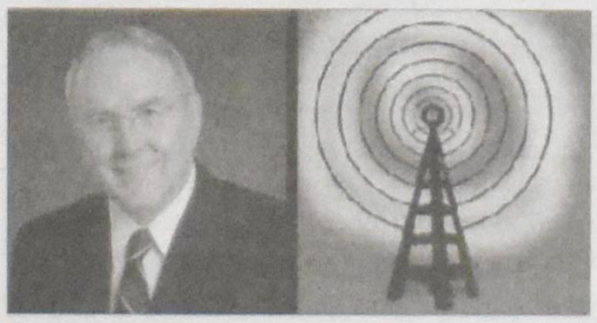
See **A Reason to Exist** *on p. 2*

The temptations of evangelicalism and liberal Protestantism

James K.A. Smith

In North America, but perhaps also globally, the Reformed tradition needs to navigate between twin temptations: the Scylla of generic evangelicalism and the Charybdis of bland liberal Protestantism. Both represent a loss of a distinctively Reformed heritage.

By "the Reformed tradition" I mean an *ecclesiastical* tradition rather than an intellectual tradition. But I'm concerned about the ecclesiastical tradition precisely because I think the Reformed intellectual tradition is nourished by Reformed worship. For too long, Reformed scholars and intellectuals have taken for granted the liturgical and ecclesiastical seedbed that produced the rich intellectual tradition in Reformed Christianity.



For some in the denomination, James Dobson is the functional pope and Christian radio is the magisterium – because Christian faith has been reduced to an identity in the culture wars and thus a generic, "conservative" faith will do.

Indeed, at times Reformed intellectuals have spent a lot of their time biting (off!) the hand that feeds them. But if we care about the Reformed intellectual tradition, we need to care about Reformed ecclesial practice (including both liturgy and polity).

So when I suggest that "the Reformed tradition" faces the twin temptations of megachurch evangelicalism and flattened liberal Protestantism, I have in mind those ecclesiastical traditions that find their impetus and animus in the magisterial Reformation – those denominations with a historic confessional heritage rather than the sprawling network of nondenominational start-ups that take themselves to be "Calvinists." It is these historic Reformed denominations that uniquely feel the pressure to become something either than – and less than – Reformed. Obviously the pressures are different, depending on the denomination. Not much of the Presbyterian Church of Canada, for example, is tempted by generic evangelicalism. However, it is a temptation for those who resist the slide into liberalism to latch onto a generic "conservatism" in response. And thus they end up falling off the other side of the wagon.

Some denominations, including my own (the Christian Reformed Church of North America), feel both pressures and are beset by both temptations. For some in the denomination, James Dobson is the functional pope and Christian radio is the magisterium – because Christian faith has been reduced to an identity in the culture wars and thus a generic, "conservative" faith will do. But there's nothing distinctively Reformed about such faith. On the other hand, elites and intellectuals within the denomination are aghast to think that their professional colleagues might associate them with the backwardness of people who worry about evolution or might not be "progressive" about homosexuality. And so they are bent on a progressive version of the faith that is all too happy to throw overboard some of the more embarrassing distinctives of the

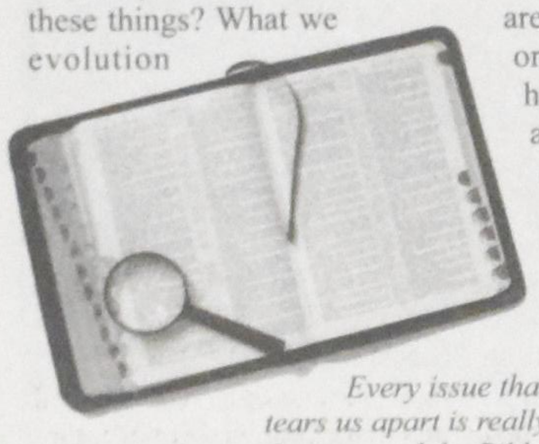
See **Temptations** *on p. 2*

News

Agreeing on a Biblical hermeneutic

Vicki Cok

Reformed people need to figure out whether we worship the Bible or the God revealed in the Bible. We agree that Scripture is the Word of God and as such it is infallible and central to faith and life, but we use it more and more to further personal agendas rather than to be formed and transformed by it. Every issue that tears us apart is really an issue over how to read the Bible. Evolution is fuelled by disagreements over biblical genre. Is Genesis history, or is it poetry or myth or something else entirely? Women in office is fuelled by disagreements over the role that historical context should or should not play in biblical interpretation. Should patriarchal directives that come from a patriarchal society be normative for all societies? Homosexuality is fuelled by disagreements over the meaning and extent of inspiration. Did the authors know and understand more than their time and culture allowed concerning biology and neuroscience, or were they limited to common first-century understandings of these things? What we are arguing about is not evolution or women in office or homosexuality; we are arguing about how to read the Bible.



Every issue that tears us apart is really an issue over how to read the Bible.

We Reformed types are knowledgeable and educated people. At least we claim to be. When I attended Fuller Seminary and there saw the CRC from the outside, I was astonished by the respect given to CRC scholarship in the areas of biblical studies and philosophy. The CRC has made great contributions to the greater kingdom's understanding of the Word and the ways of God. But we are now increasingly divided between those who take an academic ("liberal") approach to Scripture, and those who hold to a more literal, fundamentalist ("conservative") approach. We've lost our centre and are bleeding members to denominations on both sides, as well as losing members who are simply tired of the arguing among brothers and sisters and who therefore leave the church entirely.

While agreeing that the Word is central, we find ourselves increasingly unable to hear what it says. As we seek to master it for our own agendas, we are increasingly unable to have it master us. Unless we can agree on a hermeneutic, we will be forever warring over the topic of the day, using proof texts as bullets, remaining deaf to the central message of grace through Christ Jesus and the call to love God above all and neighbour as self.

Rev. Vicki Cok has been pastor of the Waterloo (Ont.) Christian Reformed Church since 2005. She's an American, but she and her family love living in Canada; they're just not sure who to cheer for when the U.S. competes against Canada in the Olympics.

Maintaining distinctiveness while becoming inclusive

Esteban Lugo

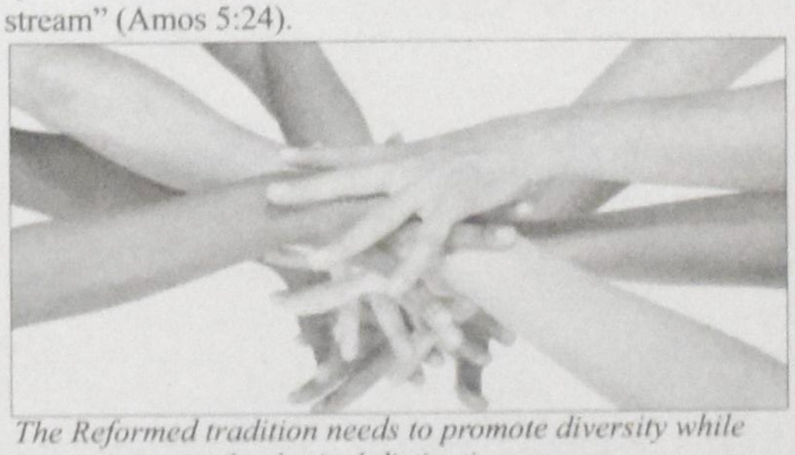
In my humble opinion I believe the most important issue currently facing the Reformed tradition is maintaining its distinction while pursuing and growing in inclusiveness. Now, I recognize that the Reformed tradition can be construed broadly or narrowly. I'm speaking narrowly from involvement with the Christian Reformed Church.

How can the Christian Reformed Church maintain its theological distinctiveness while becoming more culturally inclusive? First of all, we must not ignore the dramatic cultural diversity that is rapidly defining the 21st century in North America. We must overcome the posture of "we know the best way to do Christianity." Instead, we should find ways of sharing the Christian life without imposing culture. In doing this, we might consider other Christian traditions such as Pentecostal, Evangelical and Catholic, which reflect more inclusivity than the Reformed tradition.

The decline of denominational loyalty may, on one hand, contribute to helping the Reformed tradition break away from its cultural entrapment, but, on the other hand, it may also contribute to a decline in its attractiveness and practice in modern society. The Reformed tradition must be careful to distinguish itself from other traditions but not to accommodate itself to the presuppositions, prejudices and illusions of bourgeois Western thought. For example, how does it help people grasp and take into account the tension between the historical and the transcendent, the ideal and the real, the absolute and the relative?

The Reformed tradition should find and value common ground with other cultures. We should let people experience biblical conversion/transformation as evidenced in the Scriptures, rather than cultural conversion. It has always been a temptation for the dominant white culture to see its culture and ways (traditions) to be superior. But the Reformed tradition and Christian Reformed Church cannot stay in an attitude of cultural separateness.

Seeing the rejection of other cultures in the Reformed tradition has been a source of resentment, anger and pain for many from minority groups. Reformed traditions must consider keeping the identity and dignity of minority people intact. I believe that the Reformed tradition needs to discover and promote the crucial truths of an "all nations missiology-ecclesiology" for the 21st century church. Only then can "justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream" (Amos 5:24).



The Reformed tradition needs to promote diversity while maintaining its theological distinctiveness.

I believe that the Reformed Tradition's greatest challenge today is transcending its cultural origins to be relevant to other people and cultures, to have integrity between what we profess and live out and to provide spiritual direction and counsel to communicants in pursuing spiritual development and sanctification. Its credibility is on the line.

Esteban Lugo is of Puerto Rican descent and was born and raised in Chicago, Ill. He has served the Christian Reformed Church as a church planter and pastor since the early 1980s, and in 2004 was appointed director of the CRC's Office of Race Relations. He and his wife Carmen live in Kentwood, Mich., with two of their five children.

The pull of the social gospel

John Bolt

The most significant challenge facing the church during the time of the 16th-century Reformation was the truth of the Gospel itself. The danger was not that the Roman Catholic Church did not believe in nor teach about grace. The famous Reformation slogan, *sola gratia* – by grace alone – did not mean that grace was *absent* in Roman Catholic teaching or practice; the risk to the Gospel was that grace given in the sacraments needed to be *supplemented* by works. The Council of Trent (1545-1563) said "If any one says, that by faith alone the impious is justified; in such wise as to mean, that nothing else is required to co-operate in order to the obtaining the grace of Justification, and that it is not in any way necessary, that he be prepared and disposed by the movement of his own will; let him be anathema."

Today, I wonder if some of us are forgetting the Reformation battle for the Gospel and lapsing back into add-on works-righteousness. Our obsession with works is not climbing church steps, lashing our bodies with whips or paying indulgences to get relatives out of purgatory. Nonetheless, the Christian Reformed Church's website, our publications and even our synodical agendas are dominated by *this-worldly works* of doing good: alleviating AIDS, solving poverty, saving the planet, resolving the Mid-East Conflict, meeting United Nation's Millennium Goals and the list goes on. Is this the task that our Lord gave to his disciples when he ascended (Matt. 28:18-20)? Is this what the church should be devoting its resources to? Gathering ministry shares? Training pastors for CRC ministry?

Johann Tetzel sold indulgences that supposedly released the souls of the dead from punishment in purgatory. Is the social gospel a modern version of such works righteousness thinking?

Why are we doing this? Are we also buying indulgences? Is the social gospel pulling us toward "doing" as a way of alleviating our guilt for being North Americans, for living well, when much of the world suffers?

We are called to do good but not, let us never forget, out of guilt. The Catechism calls us to do good out of gratitude. "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery" (Gal. 5:1). In some ways our works righteousness is less significant and noble than that of medieval Roman Catholics who put their coins in Tetzel's boxes. We only do it to make this world better; they, at least, did it to get into heaven.

John Bolt is an ordained Christian Reformed minister and Professor of Systematic Theology at Calvin Theological Seminary. He has also taught at Redeemer College and Calvin College.

A Reason to Exist *continued*

and staff from 55 different Christian denominations. I experience daily the many ways in which the blessings of a Reformed vision are worked out in the lives of folks from ALL of these denominations. But a university provides the kind of reflective space that is hard to find in our culture. I do see many Reformed congregations and communities also longing for the kind of space that will help them follow Christ faithfully, biblically and in Spirit-led ways. So, I'm cautiously and prayerfully hopeful.

Dr. Syd Hielema serves as the chaplain and Associate Professor of Religion at Redeemer University College in Ancaster, Ont. He is also a member of the Faith Formation Committee of the Christian Reformed Church.

Temptations *continued from p. 1*

Reformed confessional heritage.

But we need not see this situation as an occasion for despair. I see it as an opportunity to diagnose the problem and revivify a robust understanding of the Reformed tradition. And the way to navigate between these twin temptations, I would suggest, is to renew our sense of the Reformed tradition as a part of *catholic* Christianity.

James K.A. Smith is professor of philosophy at Calvin College where he also teaches in the department of congregational and ministry studies. He is the author of a number of books, including most recently, Letters to a Young Calvinist: An Invitation to the Reformed Tradition.

News

Navigating confessionalism and contextualism

Shiao Chong

I believe the biggest issue facing the Reformed tradition in North America is how to navigate between the two extremes of *confessionalism* and *contextualism*. Confessionalism makes adherence to a traditional formulation of beliefs the ultimate good. Contextualism, on the other hand, makes engagement and relevance to contemporary culture and life the ultimate good. We need to walk the fine balance between them. We need to take traditional Reformed beliefs seriously without equating them with infallible Scripture. We need to engage and be informed by cultural concerns without letting them dictate our theologizing of Scripture. This tension is present in most recent controversies.

We see this tension between confessionalism and contextualism, for example, in the recent controversy over evolutionary science and the origins of humanity. How much do we let science and its discoveries inform and shape how we read and theologize Scripture? And how much are we willing to go against long cherished beliefs enshrined in our Reformed confessions? I suspect the knee-jerk reaction of many to recent scientific challenges betrays a confessionalism confused with faithfulness to Scripture. Even the debates in the Christian Reformed Church surrounding the Belhar Confession, including related topics like the gospel's relation to social justice, orthopraxis and orthodoxy, are shaped by divisions between those who lean toward confessionalism and those who lean toward contextualism.

Entangled in all these controversies are our youth and young adults ... most [of whom] want a Reformed Christianity that robustly engages contemporary questions yet remains rooted in the historic beliefs.

Connected to these disagreements is the deep issue of identity – what does it mean to be Reformed? Confessionalists tend to answer that traditional Reformed beliefs enshrined in the "Three Forms of Unity" for example, or like John Piper and his ilk would say, enshrined in the acronym TULIP, are what defines Reformed Christianity. Contextualists might point to the slogan, "a reformed church is always reforming," and/or other themes. Contextualists might also engage the recent missional church movement more positively.

Entangled in all these controversies are our youth and young adults. I believe that most young adults want a Reformed Christianity that robustly engages contemporary questions yet remains rooted in the historic beliefs. They do not want either a fossilized but clear theological system irrelevant to their pressing questions or a dynamic cultural and social conscience but fuzzy in its beliefs and identity. And their voices need to be heard and engaged if North American Reformed Christianity is to find a way between confessionalism and contextualism.

Shiao Chong is the Christian Reformed Campus Minister & Director of Leadership, Culture and Christianity, a student club at York University, Toronto. He has published numerous articles for various Christian publications, including Christian Courier.

The politics of sexuality

Meg Jenista

Have you ever been seated in the middle of a long table at a restaurant? Flanked on either side by two different conversations, you are on the fringes of both and must decide where to join in. As Reformed Christians, this seems to be our perennially assigned seating.

At one side of the table, our evangelical brothers and sisters decry the world and showcase their martyrdom in a hostile, secular world. On the other side of the table, our mainline Protestant brothers and sisters one-up each another with recent examples of their unflinching willingness to let the world's assumptions and entertainments set the agenda for Christian conversation. Nowhere is this tension more acutely felt than when the whole table turns their attention to the politics of sexuality.

To the right, the conversation centres on defining sin. What are the absolute lines of sexual purity that may never be crossed? Who is good? Who is bad? For Reformed Christians who haven't lost sight of total depravity's teaching, this hardly seems a satisfying or nuanced conversation about who we are as human persons, made in the image of God.

So we turn to the left, where mainline Protestants trip over themselves apologizing for the fact that Christianity might, in actuality, place expectations on people. No one has the right to judge. Everyone should be free to do what feels right. For Reformed Christians who take baptismal identity seriously, this hardly seems a substantial contribution to living our sexuality with integrity.

So Reformed Christians are stuck trying to squeeze ourselves into one polarizing, myopic conversation or another. But Biblical proof-texting and generalized positive affirmations do not a theology make.

Reformed Christians are stuck trying to squeeze ourselves into one polarizing, myopic conversation or another.

Can Reformed Christians create another dialogue? A conversation that relishes the *Imago Dei* and wrestles honestly with the universal ramifications of humanity's fall into sin? A conversation which acknowledges that God calls humans, precisely because of rather than despite our embodiment, to become Christ's disciples? A conversation which recognizes that, for the baptized Christian, nothing other than our union with Christ ultimately claims, owns or identifies us in this world? Can we avoid cliché? Can we navigate between entrenched polemics? Can we eschew the easy answers promulgated at either end of the table and learn to talk about sexuality honestly, robustly, with integrity and grace?

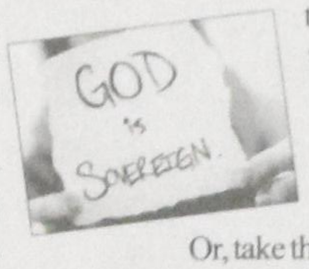
Rev. Meg Jenista is the Minister of Community Life and Witness at Third Christian Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, Mich.

The sovereignty of God

Peter Hoytema

It may seem strange, but I believe the most important issue currently facing the Reformed tradition is our belief in the *sovereignty of God*. The concern is not that fewer and fewer of us actually believe this all-encompassing doctrine, but that trends both within Reformed churches and in their increasingly secular environments require us to live by our belief in God's sovereignty with unprecedented tenacity.

Consider, for instance, the fact that we find ourselves living at a time when once again, challenges to a traditional understanding of the opening chapters of the Bible are being presented by contemporary scientific discovery. Will the tendency to regard this issue as an intractable conflict and a cause for division in church and school communities continue? Will we demand confessional precision on every point in our treatment of this issue, or, when faced with apparent disagreements between scientific inquiry and theological reflection, will we be content to let some issues remain unresolved and left in the mind of our sovereign God?



Or, take the issue of declining church membership and the departure of some among us, particularly young adults, who leave to join churches of a non-Reformed variety. Our tendency is to regard former years when our churches were fuller as the high standard from which we've fallen. Will we have the honesty to admit that those perceived "glory days" had far more to do with simple demographics than with our competence? Whether it's in the past, present or future, will we regard spiritual flourishing as primarily the result of God's work and not our own? Will we trust that people will meet their sovereign Lord in churches other than ours, and perhaps even more meaningfully in some ways? Will we be assured of the unique place our communions have in God's broader church and kingdom, carefully avoiding the pitfalls of both self-importance and despondency?

Here's a really important question: Just how comfortable will some of us be with being small? Will the smallness be all we see? Or will we notice the presence of a sovereign God, who regularly seems predisposed to using the little and the least to accomplish his will here on earth? Increasingly, the sovereignty of God will present a big challenge to Reformed Christians. The issue isn't whether we believe it. It's about how committed we are to living by it.

Peter Hoytema is the pastor of Westmount CRC in Strathroy, Ont.

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When parents age

Henry Baron

When parents grow into "aging parents," the children's concern for their welfare increases. Often they live at some distance from the parents, and for greater peace of mind they want to re-arrange their parents' life, to make it safer and easier. But sometimes they forget about the parents' peace of mind. For people, especially as they age, tend to be averse to re-arrangements of the familiar; change threatens their peace of mind, as it does in this true story.

She sat in her favourite armchair by the window that faced Front Street. Dusky shadows floated into the room, but she did not stir to turn on the light next to her chair. She was thinking, remembering and not willing to let go of the day's dying hours. Tomorrow she would move.

But she did not want to move. This was her place. She had lived here ever since her husband died 25 years ago, when she sold the farm and bought this house on Front Street. Here she had grieved and worked and finished raising her family and made her home. Here she had been lonely; but here she had also learned to be independent.

Across the street two backup lights flicked on and pointed toward her window. She watched the neighbours slowly back out of their driveway. As they pulled away, she heard the horn's familiar farewell signal to seven-year-old Kevin left in the babysitter's care. A sudden spasm shook her shoulders, and for the moment she could not help but yield to emotions pushing to the surface. She dropped her face into her hands and cried. She cried not only for her home here that she would lose, but for the life on the other side of her window, the life she had observed for 25 years and to which she still felt herself so intimately connected.

When caring for aging parents, children must respect their parents' need for peace of mind.

Every morning she would watch the red-haired mail lady make the rounds. Early afternoons she could usually count on Mrs. Van Schepen and Mrs. Wielens from the nearby Rest Home walking arm in arm slowly toward the downtown Senior Center. Later she could watch the children coming home from school. And always there were the cars, the trucks, the farm machinery, the local bus line that testified to a busy life of commerce and purpose. Then there was Sunday. A steady parade of worshippers would pass by her window, young and old, familiar faces all, and some would always turn in her direction and greet her with a wave and a smile. And when later she would walk to her own church, she would savour that family feeling of belonging. Her home stood in the midst of life, and that life was her life too.

But the children had said: "This house is getting too much for you, Mom. Too much upkeep and responsibility. It's time to sell and move to a nice apartment where you don't have to do much work and worry anymore. You're nearly 80 now." They meant well, she knew. And maybe they were right. Yet she felt only pain at the prospect of exchanging her beloved place on Front Street with a strange, secluded spot on the edge of town. In the gathering darkness she wondered again why her life must often be so hard. She didn't want to feel resentment; yet, there was so much she had wanted so differently. It had been such a toilsome life. It wasn't the hard work she resented; she had gotten used to that at an early age. It was the grief, the losses, the solitary years, the burdens of responsibility and worry. And now, tomorrow, she would lose again, and she would have to make another start. Weariness overcame her, and she felt defeated. She folded her hands, but no prayer would come.

Then the clock in the adjoining room struck 10. She found the switch of the light next to her and turned it on. The darkness gave way, and her eyes fell on the wall piece that had been hers since her wedding day. And as it had so often in the past, the familiar text spoke to her again: "Werp uwe zorg op den Heere, en Hij zal u onderhouden." ("Cast your burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain you.") "Thank you, Lord," she whispered.

She stood up. Tomorrow she would move.

The children's concern for their aging parents needs to be blended with acute sensitivity to their misgivings and fears. For a child's peace of mind should never come at the expense of the parent's peace of mind.

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Christian Courier

Founded in 1945

An independent biweekly that seeks to engage creatively in critical Christian journalism, connecting Christians with a network of culturally savvy partners in faith for the purpose of inspiring all to participate in God's renewing work within his fallen creation.

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The paper is published the second and fourth Mondays of the month.

Christian Courier
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St Catharines ON L2N 1V1

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1-800-969-4838
Web site: christiancourier.ca

We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Canada Periodical Fund of the Department of Canadian Heritage.

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Our Boss who art in heaven

Bert Witvoet

Since my friend and fellow editorial writer Henry Baron decided to use narrative as his mode of expressing a point of view, I have decided to follow suit and tell you about a conversation I participated in at our recent Christmas family gathering at a ski resort in the Okanagan mountains of British Columbia. Time spent in the workshop of our Creator God prepared me well for the point I am trying to make in this true story.

I overheard one of our sons talk to his brothers about the sloppy workmanship that today often passes for quality housing. He and his wife were visiting people who showed them their new home. The couple praised the company that built the house, because, they said, they were given one full year to have problems fixed without cost. Just the other day they noticed that their bathtub was a bit unsteady. So they phoned the company, and they immediately sent out a crew to rectify the problem. Such a quick and efficient response! Workmen broke a hole into the adjoining bedroom wall, placed some shims underneath the tub, closed up the hole and repainted the wall. Before that the floor had creaked in another part of the house, and the company again quickly sent a crew down to the basement and fixed the problem. The couple was very pleased with such service. They had a full year to fix upcoming problems!

My son and his wife looked at each other and thought the same thing. How come a company allows such sloppy workmanship in the first place, never mind their willingness to repair? What excuse does anyone have for placing a bathtub in a room without making sure that the installation is solid?

Craftsmen in the Middle Ages were concerned not only about how their structures had to fit together perfectly in places that were visible to the human eye, but also in places that were hidden from sight and would never be noticed by anyone.

Another son, who is a builder himself, agrees that such poor workmanship is quite common. He himself is a perfectionist and finds that some people are not willing to pay the price for quality work. He refuses to compromise, however. He once told me that if you aim for good enough in building, it ends up being inferior. He himself aims for perfect, and then it ends up being good enough, because nobody is perfect.

I myself recalled reading somewhere how craftsmen in the Middle Ages were concerned not only about how their structures had to fit together perfectly in places that were visible to the human eye, but also in places that were hidden from sight and would never be noticed by anyone. That's because they believed that God would see their imperfection and not approve of what they had done. Their conscience would not allow them to take shortcuts.

This comment caused my wife to recall that one of our wall hangings at home has a text written at the bottom that reads: "Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men" (Col. 3: 23). Another son wryly remarked that we seem to have lost some of that attitude along the way. That surely qualifies as the understatement of the decadent decade.

Now I must admit that when it comes to using my hands to make something, I don't have the same attitude of perfection as the rest of my family does. I tend to be more easily satisfied with the construction of physical structures than my wife, for example. Our children have inherited this trait from her. I excuse myself by saying that I don't pretend to be a

Letters

Governments and gambling

Regarding Meagan Gillmore's "Problem gambling and the church" (*CC* Nov. 14, 2011), it's about time this issue was raised. Yes, three percent of Canadians are problem gamblers, but even more alarming is the fact that approximately six percent of those aged 16-24 are included in this statistic. The future cost of gambling will surely increase.

The estimated cost to society of a problem gambler ranges from $13,00 to $20,00 per year, taking into account related factors such as theft, incarceration, counselling and recidification (in Alberta). Yet Ontario spends approximately one-third of one percent of gambling revenues to address problem gambling, while acknowledging becoming more and more dependent on profits derived from gambling. The millions of dollars spent on advertising promoting casinos and lotteries only reinforce the greed in this approach to taxation.

Lotteries were used in the past as money raising schemes. For example, the 1976 Olympic debt was partially reduced through lottery revenues. And the state of Virginia depended on lottery returns for its early infrastructure requirements. The Virginia lottery even had its own advertising jingle. Here are the last lines:

> The merchants of Virgina now,
> Hathy nobly tooke in hand,
> The bravest golden lottery
> There ere was in this land.

Not everyone was convinced, however, and a century later the poet Henry Fielding penned this tart retort:

> A lottery is a taxation
> upon all the fools in creation;
> and Heav'n be prais'd
> it is easily rais'd
> credulity's always in fashion;
> for Folly's a fund
> will never lose ground,
> while fools are so rife in the nation.

Gambling will not go away, but governments' mentality and approach have to change. Removing slots and VLTs (video lottery terminals) and their kissing cousins, scratch and win lotteries, would be a good first step. Staying the course will only bring more problems such as increased crime and a greater cost to society (not only in treatment and court costs etc., but also in social issues and broken relationships). That's not a long shot, you can bet the house.

T. Posthumus
Oshawa, Ont.

Two-kingdom doctrine

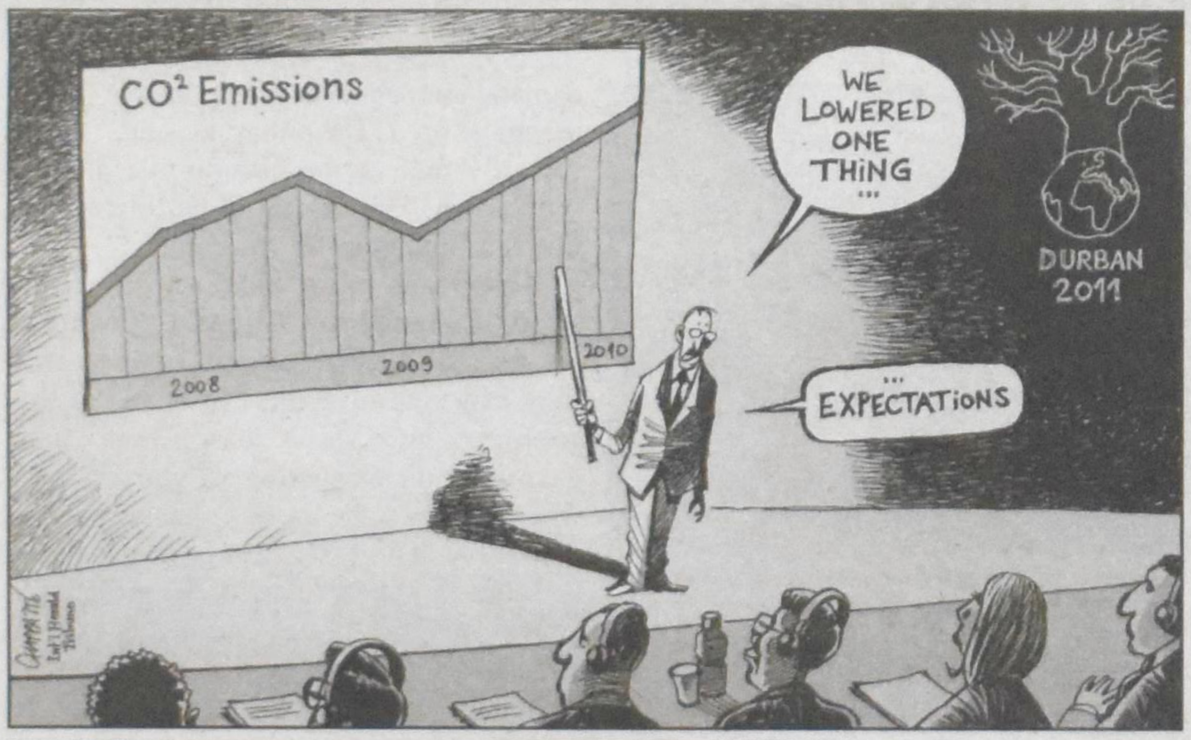
Timothy Palmer's two-piece mischaracterization of the Reformed two-kingdom doctrine (2KD) and attack on Professor David Van Drunen – and by association, Westminster Theological Seminary – must not go unchallenged. Palmer's case can be summed up thus: 2KD is a Lutheran idea, not at all Reformed; it reflects a sacred/secular dualism and limits the Lordship of Christ to the church; Abraham Kuyper does not subscribe to it and in fact is the antidote to it. To call 2KD "Reformed" is preposterous and puts its proponents outside of the Reformed camp on this issue.

One need not agree with Van Drunen on every point to know that this is an incorrect presentation at several levels. 2KD does not deny that Christ is Lord of the universe as well as the church. What Palmer seems not to understand or acknowledge is that Christ is Lord of the universe – for the sake of the church! – *in a different way* than he is Lord of the Church. This distinction, made in every Reformed theological textbook, including Louis Berkhof's *Systematic Theology*, is the contrast between the *regnum potentiae* (the kingdom of power) and the *regnum gratiae* (the kingdom of grace).

This is the key to 2KD; as Reformed Christians we do not attribute gracious, salvific significance to the realm of providential governance like the Anabaptist tradition does. The spiritual rule of Christ over his church is NOT the pattern for how we live in the civic realm or in broader society. Forgiveness and "turning the other cheek" are NOT to be seen as rules for how nations live in relation to each other. And on the most mundane of matters, we do not learn multiplication tables or how to fertilize our gardens from the Bible or the kingdom of grace but from the creation which is providentially governed by our Lord's reign of power.

How the new life in Christ then relates to this natural, created world, is a topic worthy of discussion. Undoubtedly we would not all agree on the details. That should not be a problem; we can and should learn from each other. However, we do not learn and the Reformed Christian world is harmed not helped by the misunderstanding put forward in these two articles. Palmer's position does not advance a discussion, it draws lines and creates hostile camps. Abraham Kuyper is important to us; unfortunately Palmer completely misses the subtlety and careful nuance of Van Drunen's discussion of Kuyper and neo-Calvinism. I invite *CC* readers to read Van Drunen for themselves and to carefully, fairly and sympathetically consider the actual evidence he provides rather than rely on Palmer's treatment.

John Bolt
Professor of Systematic Theology
Calvin Seminary in Grand Rapids, Mich.



"Rebuke the discerning, and they will gain knowledge."
Proverbs 19:25

Have something to say about one of our articles? Send a letter to editor@christiancourier.ca and be part of the conversation.

Our Boss *continued*

builder. But when it comes to the craft of writing, moveover – I, too, aim for perfection in the hope that it will be good enough.

The final thoughts of the evening came when the first son said that we have to live our life today as if the Kingdom of Heaven is already here. In other words, all the standards of that kingdom apply now as we do our work. To which the builder son replied, "Yes, and if I were to build something in heaven, I could be sure that God would provide in my every need. So why should I be afraid that he won't do that today since the kingdom is here?"

This is my editorial for the New Year, gleaned from our communal discussion. May all of us who profess to be followers of Christ realize that our worship is not just a matter of prayer and Bible reading, but also one of showing respect for the structural integrity of our work. Our boss is in heaven, and he expects us to be perfect as he is. I take my cue from the snowy slopes of Mount Baldy! Sloppy builders are an abomination in God's eyes.

Bert Witvoet (bert.witvoet@sympatico.ca) lives in St. Catharines, Ontario, in a house that the builder built for himself 60 years ago. It shows.

Christian Courier

Member of Canadian Church Press and Evangelical Press Association

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Postmaster: send address changes to: Christian Courier, Box 110
Lewiston NY 14092

Subscriptions:	**Canada and USA**	**Overseas**
one year (24 issues)	$58.00	$100
two years (48 issues)	$110.00	

Advertising deadlines: display and classified advertising: Tuesday, 9 a.m. (13 days before publication date) See classified pages or web site **www.christiancourier** for more details. (ISSN 1192-3415) Published second and fourth Mondays of the month.

Address all correspondence to: 5 Joanna Dr, St. Catharines ON L2N 1V1
Tel: 905-682-8311 or 1-800-969-4838
e-mail: Advertising: ads@christiancourier.ca
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News

Hungary: New constitution is pro-life but prohibits religious freedom

BUDAPEST (CCO/BosNewsLife) – The new Hungarian constitution, which protects life from the moment of conception and bans same-sex marriage, will also have an impact upon religious freedom. The constitution took effect on Jan. 1.

Kim Lane Scheppele, director of the Program in Law and Public Affairs at Princeton University, asserts that the new constitution discriminates against Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity (various Protestant denominations and Catholic religious orders).

Writing in *The New York Times*, Scheppele asked, "What does the law on churches do?" – then answered her own question. "It creates 14 state-recognized religions, and decertifies the rest."

When the constitution went into effect on New Year's Day, more than 300 denominations lost their official status in Hungary, including their tax exemptions and abilities to run state-funded schools, she noted.

Among the religions that will no longer be able to operate without state approval are all versions of Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and Baha'i. Hungary has 10 million Catholics, but even Catholic orders like the Benedictines, Marists, Carmelites and Opus Dei have come under fire. Also no longer recognized are a number of major Protestant denominations including Episcopalians and Methodists, and all but one of the evangelical church. Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh Day Adventists are also on the list. One of each of the orthodox, conservative and liberal Jewish synagogues are recognized, but all other Jewish congregations are not.

János Lázár, leader of Fidesz, Hungary's ruling party.

In December János Lázár, caucus leader of Fidesz (Hungary's ruling party), had asked legislators to ensure that only churches with at least "100 years of international operations" could be recognized. Others need to re-register themselves in front of parliament's religious committee in order to have a chance to continue as an official church.

Interestingly, Lázár asked the Hungarian Reformed Church and the Hungarian Lutheran Church to name the "global religions and religious communities" which they believe should be added to the circle of recognized churches in Hungary. Both churches had urged the government to expand the church status to other faith groups. In a letter, Lazar urged them to identify those communities who "have demonstrated that their teachings promote values and their social services benefit the community."

In a petition to parliament by the Southern Baptist Convention, Hungary's Civil Liberties Union and Helsinki Committee and other groups condemned Hungary's new laws as a "serious setback for religious freedom in Hungary."

Raises serious questions

Hungary's small Church of God said recently the constitution's final text is "very different" than the version shown to faith groups during a May consultation. "I don't think anyone will come and tell us we can't worship God," explained Laszlo Debreceni, a leader of the Church of God, which has been in Hungary since 1907 but was nevertheless stripped of recognition. "But it will raise serious issues that some churches are now on the approved list and others not."

The new constitution is not going down well with many Hungarians. On the day after it took effect, thousands of protesters gathered outside the State Opera where their country's leaders were holding a glitzy celebration of the event. The protesters jeered, chanted, whistled and hoisted placards. Protesters repeatedly shouted "bovli" – "junk" in Hungarian – mocking Hungary's recent credit rating downgrades.

"The prime minister took an oath to defend the constitution, but instead he overthrew it," Laszlo Majtenyi, a former head of the media authority, told the crowd. "Tonight the Opera is the home of hypocrisy and the street the home of constitutional virtues."

Opposition activists and civil rights groups say Orban and his centre-right Fidesz party, which has a two-thirds parliamentary majority, have passed laws eroding the democratic system of checks and balances by increasing political control over the judiciary, the central bank, religious groups and the media, reported *The Associated Press*.

After outcry, U.S. Navy rescinds Bible ban for military patients

Marian Van Til, *with files from CWN/FNO*

BETHESDA, Maryland – Under heavy pressure from congressional and religious leaders, the U.S. Navy rescinded a policy in early January that forbade visitors from giving Bibles or religious articles to wounded troops at the nation's leading military hospital.

In a Sept. 14 memo regarding visits to patients at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, chief of staff C.W. Callahan wrote, "No religious items (i.e., Bibles, reading material and/or artifacts) are allowed to be given away or used during a visit." The memo, as written, would have made it impossible for relatives or chaplains to give wounded troops Bibles, rosaries or other faith-related items.

When Callahan's memo was made public, religious leaders reacted with indignation. Congressman Steve King of Iowa said, "The President of the United States should address this and should excoriate the people who brought about this policy, and the individual who brought it about should be dismissed from the United States military." King is himself a practicing Catholic and represents Iowa's District 5 in the western part of the state, which includes Sioux Center and many other heavily CRC communities.

King noted that the policy "means you can't bring in a Bible and read from it when you visit your son or your daughter, perhaps – or your wife or husband. It means a priest that might be coming in to visit someone on their death bed couldn't bring in the Eucharist, couldn't offer Last Rites. This is the most outrageous affront."

Backpeddling

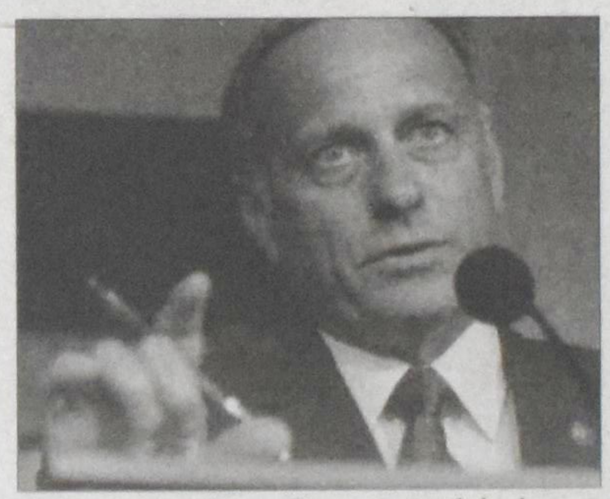
The vocal criticism from King and others had an immediate effect. The Navy quickly announced that the policy had been rescinded. The intent of the memo, they insisted, was not to prevent military patients from receiving desired religious items, but to deter pamphleteers from leaving unwanted material with patients (i.e., preventing "proselytizing").

Sandy Dean, a public affairs officer for Walter Reed, said a new policy would be "written to articulate our initial intention, which was to respect religious and cultural practices of our patients." The instruction was "in no way meant to prohibit family members from providing religious items to their loved ones at all," she said.

If that was so, why did the Navy rescind the policy, Dean was asked. "We don't want there to be any misinterpretation of what we're trying to say," she said. "We don't want our instructions to be ambiguous."

Rep. King was not impressed. The military has some explaining to do, he said. "I don't think there's any excuse for it and there's no talking it away. The very existence of this, whether it's enforced or not, tells you what kind of a mindset is there."

He continued, "The idea that these soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines that have fought to defend our Constitution, and that includes our First Amendment rights to religious liberty – would be denied that



Congressman Steve King critcized the ban.

religious liberty when they are lying in a hospital bed recovering from wounds incurred while defending that liberty is the most bitter and offensive type of an irony that I can think of."

Unprecedented hostility

The policy also brought strong condemnation from religious groups, churches and conservative advocacy groups.

"It flies in the face of not only the Bill of Rights, but 200 years of federal law," said Ken Klukwoski of the Family Research Council. "This current administration is showing unprecedented hostility towards those practicing the Christian faith. But beyond that, we've also seen a militantly secular attitude of trying to sterilize the Defense Department of all references to faith."

Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, echoed Rep. King's demand that whoever is responsible for the memo be fired. The policy, he said, "shows the ugly face of the pseudo-tolerance of secularism. They claim to be tolerant but this is as intolerant as you can be."

Americans must "take a very strong stand," Congressman King said. "Christians are generally nice people and for that reason they can victimize the Christians in this country. There was a reason that Christ gave us the demonstration of righteous anger when he threw the money changers out of the temple. It gives us some license to throw these kinds of people out of the military."

King said he's been alarmed at a trend he has seen to scrub Christianity from the military – most recently the decision to remove a cross from an Army chapel in northern Afghanistan because it violated Army regulations.

"This is Orwellian," he said. "Who would have believed even two or five years ago that the executive branch of government led by our Commander in Chief Barack Obama would produce some kind of document that would prohibit family members coming into our military hospitals with Bibles."

Klukwoski said he's noticed a similar trend in what he called "anti-faith measures." "We are seeing a shocking level of hostility towards religious faith, but beyond that – we've also seen a militantly secular attitude of trying to sterilize the Defense Department of all references to faith," said Klukwoski.

News

India: No 'true Hindus' attacked Christians, says Hindu commissioner

MANGALORE, India – At Christmas time there were three separate attacks on buildings where Christians were gathered in Mangalore. Mangalore is a city of about a half-million people in the southwestern Indian state of Karnataka. In the attacks, a prayer hall was damaged by stones being thrown, the crib of a Nativity scene was burned and 15 members of an evangelical church were attacked while eating dinner at the home of one of the members.

Father Ivan D'Souza, a parish priest in Karnataka, said he suspected Hindu extremists were behind the burning of the crib in a community Nativity scene built during a parish-wide holiday competition. He surmised that the arsonists were likely trying to "disturb the peace of the place."

Regina Fernandes, who lives near the site of the attack, said she heard dogs barking at about 3 a.m. on Dec. 29. "We saw the crib on fire and rushed outside and tried to put out the fire. In the morning we saw kerosene and petrol bottles in the crib."

Meanwhile in Haleyangad, a group of about a dozen unidentified people hurled stones and broke window panes at a prayer hall belonging to the Hebron Church. I.D. Prasanna, the local pastor, said the attackers also damaged three motorbikes parked near the church, and that closed circuit cameras had recorded the attackers fleeing the scene. He added that local police commissioner Seemanth Kumar Singh had visited the hall and assured him that a complete investigation would be conducted.

Those attacks followed an assault on another group of evangelical Christians. Fifteen members of New Life Fellowship in Karnataka were eating Christmas dinner together in a member's home when the house was attacked. Head pastor Donald Menezes said that one of the victims sustained a fractured leg in the attack.

A local one-man government commission has already looked into the anti-Christian violence, but concluded that "no true Hindus" played a role in it. Commissioner B.K. Somashekhara, a former judge, insisted that neither the police nor any Hindus were responsible for the attacks.

His report said that "misguided fundamentalist miscreants of defined or undefined groups or organizations against Christians and Christianity" indulged in the attacks, "mistakenly" presuming that the ruling party would protect them. Somashekhara also asserted in the report that many Hindus had complained that "Christians indulged in religious conversions and circulated derogatory literature with insulting attitudes against Hindus." The Christians use "inducement and unaccounted local and overseas funds," to convert Hindus, the report said, "not necessarily compulsion or fraud or coercion," as alleged by Hindu radical groups.

Christians form less than two percent of Karnataka's 52.8 million people. Hindus number 44.3 million.

Calvin Seminary offers new programs to a broader range of students

GRAND RAPIDS, Michigan (CRCNA) – One student is a book editor, another the pastor of an inner-city church. Another is a woman looking for theological training for ministry in her church. They are all ages and come from various backgrounds to Calvin Theological Seminary (CTS) to attend courses in the seminary's new certificate programs in pastoral care, theology, English Bible and missions. Or they participate in the seminary's new Diploma in Ministry program.

The new programs are part of a trend. Many seminaries are trying to provide newly relevant courses to a broader range of students. Calvin Seminary is offering its certificate programs as an opportunity for church staff, volunteer ministry staff and other interested people to enhance their biblical and ecclesiastical understanding and training.

These courses of study are intended for ministry and personal enrichment. Nevertheless, the courses in the certificate programs are post-graduate level and are also offered as part of other degree programs at CTS.

Gaining a strong theological underpinning

Until now, CTS was making sure the programs were resting on solid ground and has not marketed them very widely. But the programs are now ready to be promoted to people who are not required to have a college degree yet are interested in taking one or more seminary courses.

"We have not done any significant marketing. People have found their way here," says Prof. Darwin Glassford, who directs the master's degree programs as well as oversees the certificate and diploma programs. "We have had a mixed bag of students. This is not seminary lite," says Glassford, who is also a professor of church education at the seminary.

"These programs are beneficial for several groups of people," says seminary registrar Joan Beelen. "They provide an opportunity for volunteer or paid ministry staff to gain a strong theological underpinning for the ministry in which they're already engaged." In addition, she says, the programs provide "a good stepping stone for those considering a masters degree but [who] aren't sure of their plans. It gives them a taste of seminary."

The two programs emerged out of a curriculum evaluation that Calvin Seminary conducted in 2008 and 2009. "We wanted to make our programs accessible" to those who would not otherwise get involved with them, says Glassford. A process has started, he says, to eventually put modified versions of the courses online in hopes of making them more attractive to students who may already be in the working world.

Students are required to take a few core courses, such as Reformed doctrine and a survey of the Bible. After that they can focus on inner-city ministry, overseas missions, world religions from a Christian perspective or how to provide pastoral care to people facing difficult circumstances. As it has turned out, several students who enrolled in certificate programs have gone on to seek masters' degrees.

CTS's Diploma in Ministry is geared largely for the training of "ministry associates" and was put together more recently than the certificate programs were. Although the diploma is not an accredited degree program, the Diploma in Ministry can train students for specialized ministries and requires fewer credits than a Masters of Arts (M.A.) degree. Since the requirements are flexible, the diploma can be adapted to students' vocational interests.

In cases in which a ministry staff person is required by their classis or church council to get additional theological training to become a ministry associate, this is a convenient way for them to get that training, says Beelen.

New York: Catholic schools battle over basketball and a coach's death

Marian Van Til, *with files from Fox Sports, ESPNHS*

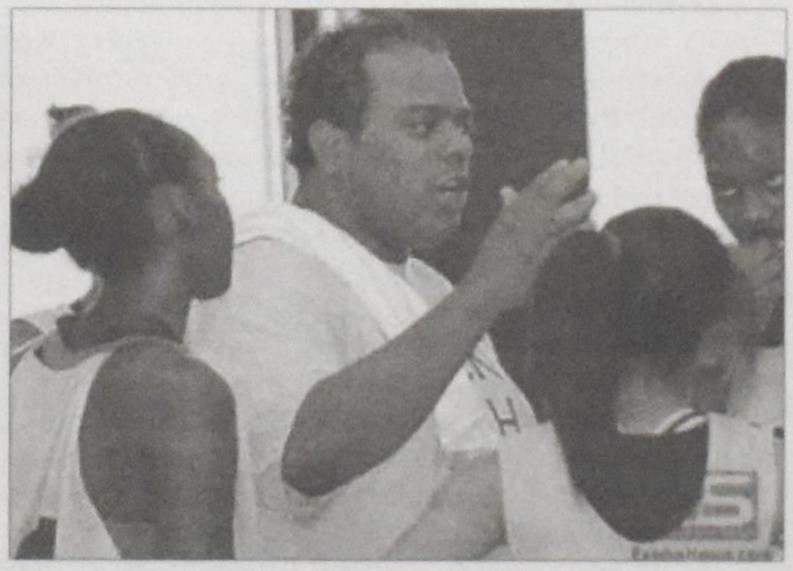
BROOKLYN, NY – Early this month two Catholic high schools known for their exceptional basketball teams got tangled in a verbal battle over whether a game should go on two days after the death – and before the funeral – of the coach of one of the teams.

Robert "Apache" Paschall, 38, the much-loved and highly effective coach of Nazareth Regional High School's girls basketball team was suffering from an aggressive skin cancer. He seemed to be doing well, so when he died on Jan. 3 it came as a shock to his students and the school community. The game scheduled for Thursday, Jan. 5 against Bishop Ford, another area Catholic school, was called off. But after some discussion, the girls decided they wanted to play the game after all.

Bishop Ford's administration, however, did not agree that the game should go on. The school refused to play the game against Nazareth. "We are a Catholic school," Bishop Ford principal Ray Nash told Fox Sports. "The gentleman isn't even buried yet. The day that we put more importance on any sort of a game before life and death is a day that we should stop being educators."

But Nazareth assistant coach Ron Kelley agreed with his young team members. He insisted that the game be played and called Bishop Ford's Nash "arrogant" for preventing it. Nazareth asked the league to officially recognize that Bishop Ford had forfeited the game.

That didn't faze Ray Nash. He believes that in this kind of circumstance adults need intervene and "teach the life lesson that mourning lost loved ones is more important than any game." He told Fox Sports, "We're the adults here. We're the ones who made the decisions that are not supposed to be made by coaches or kids, period. . . . It just blows my mind that they would even want to play the game."



"Apache" Paschall was widely seen as a father figure.

Coach Paschall was known for taking on at-risk kids and working to make them feel safe and successful, reported ESPN on their girl's high school basketball website. He himself grew up in New York's housing projects and saw his mother go to prison when he was 10 years old. Like himself, many of Paschall's players came from single-parent families, and he was widely seen as a father figure to many of them.

Columns

Flowers and Thistles

Curt Gesch

Orange juice

Last night my friend was talking with me about experiencing God and miracles every day. My friend is a wonderful person who (with her husband) invited several of us who have no family in the area to a Christmas dinner. She is also suffering from a very serious illness. Much of our conversation focused on her daily experiences of God and the host of "daily" miracles she encounters, "right here, all around me." I was inspired by her positive outlook and spiritual insight.

My friend's words reminded me of Bible passages such as this: "Today is the day of salvation." She made me think about the kingdom of God being "now" as well as "not yet." Psalm 27:13 also immediately came to mind: "I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living." We talked a little about this verse and how it helps us to look at life differently.

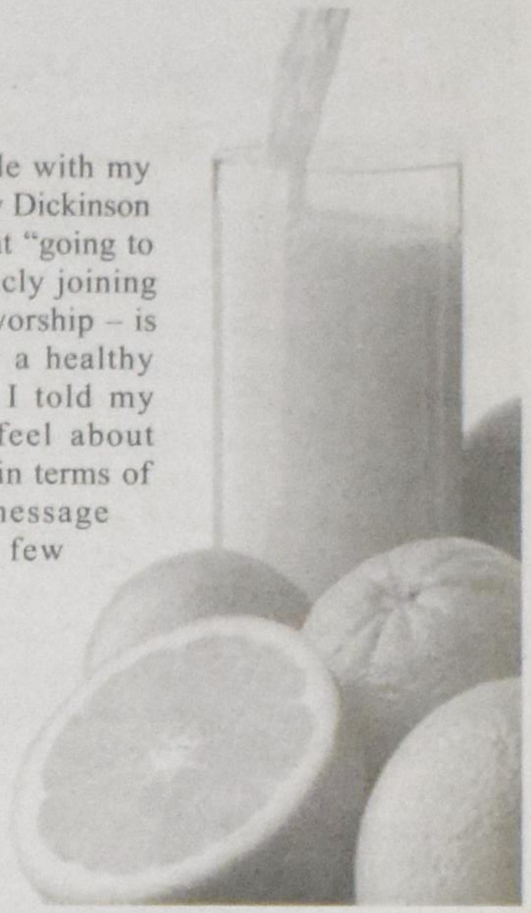
My friend's convictions also remind me of Emily Dickinson's poem, "Some keep the Sabbath going to Church."

Some keep the Sabbath going to Church –
I keep it, staying at Home –
With a Bobolink for a Chorister –
And an Orchard, for a Dome –

Some keep the Sabbath in Surplice –
I just wear my Wings –
And instead of tolling the Bell, for Church,
Our little Sexton – sings.

God preaches, a noted Clergyman –
And the sermon is never long,
So instead of getting to Heaven, at last –
I'm going, all along.

I differ a little with my friend and Emily Dickinson in that I find that "going to church" – publicly joining with others in worship – is a necessity for a healthy life and faith. I told my friend how I feel about public worship in terms of a children's message I presented a few Sundays past.



The children's lesson

Here is a lesson about worship. I called it a children's lesson and invited the two children in church that morning to come up front to help.

[On the table in front are two pitchers, one with water in it and the other empty. Also there is a can of defrosted frozen orange juice, a few glasses and a stirring spoon.]

OK, children, what do we have here? Yes, I know it's a can, but of what? **Orange juice.**

Right. Now some of us are too poor to buy the premixed stuff, so we put this stuff into a pitcher and then add water. But first, would you stick your finger into the can (it's okay) and verify that it is orange juice? **It is.**

Now I'll pour this stuff into the empty pitcher. Ooh, what glop!

Now we add water. Stir. And pour it into a couple glasses, and you can drink it. Please tell us if it really orange juice. **It is.**

So it was orange juice before and it is orange juice now? **Yes.**

The stuff in the can was made by taking orange juice from oranges and removing the water. It is called "concentrate."

Today I would like you to think about orange juice and worship. By the way you may drink your juice right now, right here, and no one will forbid you. **(Gurgles heard and orange mustaches appear.)**

[To rest of congregation. . .] Analogies are never perfect, but orange juice does make me think of worship. "Worship and work must be one," we sing. We also say that "all of life is religious," and "everything we do should be an offering to God."

And yet we come together on Sundays to worship. I think the Sunday worship is like the concentrate (you're probably way ahead of me already!). We are reminded of who we are and who God is in a formal or informal, but intentional way. And then we go about our daily acts of worship, remembering who we are and who God is in the six-day world.

Curt Gesch (cgesch63@gmail.com) worships in a very small congregation of believers located in Telkwa, British Columbia. Telkwa Christian Reformed Church holds worship services at 9:30 and 11:00 a.m. each Sunday, but only occasionally serves orange juice from the pulpit stairs.

From the Lab

Rudy Eikelboom

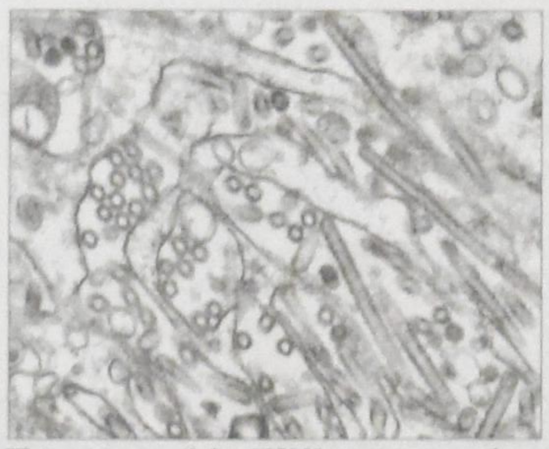
Scientific freedom with the flu?

In 1918-1920 the Spanish Flu killed 50-100 million people worldwide. In comparison, deaths due to military action in World War I are estimated at "only" nine to 15 million. It is thus for good reason that medical scientists are worried about pandemics and their health consequences.

Researchers are concerned that the flu virus could mutate and become as lethal as the 1918 version. Fortunately the H1N1-variant pandemic in 2009 proved to be less dangerous than originally thought, largely because the virus did not spread easily between humans. Researchers are now studying the H5N1 virus – an avian influenza that kills 50 percent of people infected but is currently only caught by people working with infected birds – to determine how it is transmitted from one person to another. If they knew what controls how H5N1 spreads, they would have a tool to study and prepare preventive measures.

Recently two groups (in the Netherlands and the U.S.) developed a mutation of the H5N1 virus that easily spreads between ferrets, an animal that may be similar to humans in how it reacts to this virus. They now want to publish what they have found in *Nature* and *Science*, two top science journals, so that other scientists can benefit from their findings and advance human understanding of – and ultimately defenses against – this potentially deadly disease.

This research and the attempts to publish it have been controversial, however, because this work has another side: detailed knowledge of H5N1 could also be used to develop bio-weapons. Critics point out that if this virus fell into the wrong hands, such as those of terrorists or a rogue state, it could be used to cause a pandemic as dangerous as the Spanish Flu.



This picture of the H5N1 virus was taken using an electron microscope.

In 2010 the United States government established the National Science Advisory Board for Biosecurity (NSABB) to address issues of dual-use research (research that has both legitimate use and biologic threat). In early December NSABB took the unusual step of asking *Nature* and *Science* to withhold details of the work that led to the dangerous mutant of the virus. The two journals are considering this request. Meanwhile, the scientific community is discussing the wisdom of this form of censorship. Some researchers argue that the request is constraining scientific freedom and compromising our ability to advance this area of science. They fear that these constraints would prevent us from finding a way to prevent this flu if a similar mutation were to occur in the wild.

Censorship

There are two problems with NSABB's censorship request that make it unlikely to be very effective over the longer term, even if the journals agree not to publish details. First, simply the evidence that such research can be done will be enough to propel other researchers to try to replicate it. Second, these are just two articles in an area where a lot of information is already available. Thus, while the specific details of what these two groups did may not become known, many experts in this area could duplicate their findings within a relatively short time. For any group wanting to make an H5N1 biological weapon, withholding the details would at best slow them down.

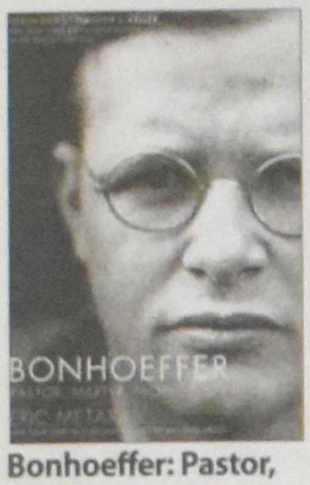
This is a biological variant of the nuclear problem: peaceful and weapons-oriented uses of nuclear knowledge are intimately linked. Controlling access to nuclear information has helped, but not been completely successful. Biological weapons are smaller and easier to build, deliver and release than nuclear weapons, making the problem even more difficult to control. Of further concern is the very real possibility that a mutation of the H5N1 virus will naturally occur and will produce a deadly pandemic. In order to prepare for this possibility, we need to further our scientific knowledge.

Humans have eaten of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and we are forced to live with the consequences. There is no earthly way out of this dilemma of knowledge; even a sharp knife can be both a useful tool and a dangerous weapon.

As Christians we know that our Creator loves us enough to have entered the creation to walk with us and die for us because we ate from the tree. Thus, like children who trust their parents, we can rest in the knowledge that God has acted and continues to act in our best interests. Our task is to act out of the same love and work to prevent the next pandemic.

Rudy Eikelboom (reikelboom@wlu.ca), who studies addiction not influenza, is a member of the Waterloo CRC and the Chair of Psychology at Wilfrid Laurier University.

Reviews



Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy
by Eric Metaxas
Nashville, TN
Thomas Nelson, 2010

Biography recounts a life transformed by costly grace

Ralph Koops

Every age has its heroes who leave a lasting legacy. In this book, Eric Metaxas – who also wrote the bestselling account of the life of William Wilberforce, *Amazing Grace* – gives us a monumental biography of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. The forword is notably written by the popular New York pastor, Timothy Keller, author of great books including *The Prodigal God*.

This biography constitutes a comprehensive study of Bonhoeffer's life, beginning with his childhood and family. His family was deeply Christian and part of an elite community which included a number of very highly educated individuals, some important government contacts, and (noteworthy, given the setting) many Jewish friends.

Since his early teens, Bonhoeffer knew that he should pursue theology. He studied under, and learned much from, the prestigious, be it liberal, Adolf von Harnack. He applied these insights to the development of a more conservative framework, akin to the great theologian Karl Barth. Intellectually, Bonhoeffer remained independent. Despite staggering workloads, he successfully completed his doctoral dissertation in eighteen months, and by the age of 21, had received his Ph. D.

Bonhoeffer lived during the first World War and experienced the longing on Germany's part, after that war, for firm leadership – a gap Adolf Hitler infamously came to fill.

Bonhoeffer was twice in the United States, and expressed himself to be very disappointed with the churches there, with the exception of the African-American preachers he saw. The racism that he witnessed while in the U.S. in turn made him more vividly sympathetic to Jews in Europe. Overall, his impression of his travels to North America was one of harsh critique: "In New York they preach about virtually everything, only one thing is not addressed, or is addressed so rarely that I have as yet been unable to hear it, namely, the gospel of Jesus Christ, the cross, sin and forgiveness and life."

From its inception, Bonhoeffer was at odds with the German Nazis. He was of the conviction that real leadership derived its authority from God and that no government was absolute. Much of the greater Lutheran community in Germany did not hold this same position, and did not see the evil of Hitler. The 1930's had already seen the horrendous killing of Jews, and the church had offered little in terms of warning. Metaxis explains how Bonhoeffer was vocal in his criticism of superficial preaching when it came to churches which did not warn against National Socialism and the Nazi party. What stood to be lost, as he understood it, was profound: "The question at stake in the German church is no longer an internal issue but is the question of the existence of Christianity in Europe."

The young German theologian was executed for his part in the plot to kill Hitler.

Bonhoeffer later spent some time in London, where he helped shape the Barmen Declaration – a warning against the rise of Nazism. During this time, he continued to correspond with the great Swiss theologian Karl Barth. Though he could have remained in the United States, he felt it his duty to return to Germany to fight the evil of Hitler and his followers.

Bonhoeffer was deeply in love with a lady much younger that him, Maria Wedemeyer. They were engaged, but never married, of course, as he did not survive the war. Extensive, moving correspondence between Bonhoeffer and Maria is included in the book.

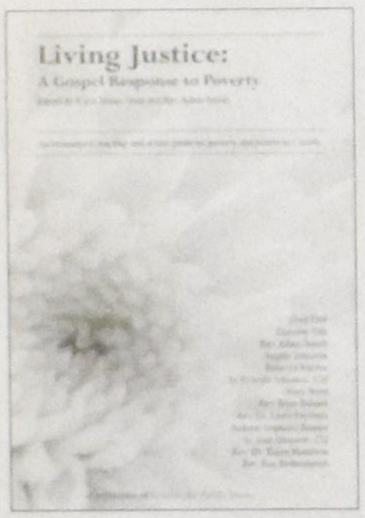
The camp doctor who saw Bonhoeffer as the latter was about to be executed said, "In the almost 50 years that I have worked as a doctor, I have hardly ever seen a man die so entirely submissive to the will of God." Bonhoeffer's last recorded words prove this assurance with which he faced death: "This is the end. For me the beginning of life." Two weeks before the liberation, Bonhoeffer was executed for his participation in the plot to assassinate Hitler. He was 39 years old when he died. Several of his immediate family members were also killed in the course of the First, and especially the Second, World War.

I had read other writings by Bonhoeffer before. This hefty book left a real impression on me. What dedication. Bonhoeffer called sin, sin. He proclaimed the gospel by both explaining Scripture and applying it to life. He had surrendered to Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. He knew that his life was in God's hand.

Metaxas includes many details and descriptions of the war, including some of the atrocities inflicted on many people, especially Jews. In a world that is in so many ways still at war, we desperately need more Bonhoeffers today who will critique the culture of our time and take action. If you are at all able, find this Bonhoeffer and read it. Thank God for people like Bonhoeffer.

Ralph Koops (ralphandanne@sympatico.ca) is a retired CRC pastor living in St. George, Ont. with his wife, still involved in various forms of ministry, and has spoiling privileges to 13 grandchildren. He is a member of Hope CRC in Brantford.

CPJ presents justice as devotion



Living Justice: A Gospel Response to Poverty
edited by Karri Munn-Venn and Rev. Adam Snook
Citizens for Public Justice, 2011

Seth Veenstra

If you were to glance at *Living Justice*, you might imagine the slim volume to be a collection of academic essays. After all, such minimalist designs are rarely used for devotionals – especially if the theme is "A gospel response to poverty." However this is not your average justice-themed devotional. Look closer and you might notice the sub-title: "An ecumenical worship and action guide on poverty and justice in Canada." Perhaps an alternate sub-title could read read: "a hands-on, gospel-fueled primer on combatting every form of poverty in Canada." No surprise, then, that this is a book published by Citizen for Public Justice (CPJ) – a Canadian organization "committed to seek human flourishing and the integrity of creation as our faithful response to God's call for love, justice, and stewardship."

"*Living Justice* is a book for Christian faith communities trying to live out the justice mandate to love the stranger, the widow and the orphan, and to seek just relations within society," (5) write Karri Munn-Venn and Rev. Adam Snook in the Introduction. Though humble in tone, the book is highly ambitious in intent: its content is meant to invite prayerful action in order "to reduce the burden for those living in poverty, and ultimately to see that poverty is eliminated" (5).

In order to address poverty, though, one needs a holistic understanding of the subject. But what exactly *is* poverty? Perhaps this is one of the biggest questions posed in *Living Justice*. In response, Munn-Venn and Snook present work of more than a dozen contributors from diverse ecumenical and professional backgrounds. Together, the contributors explore the nuances of four types of poverty: material, emotional, communal and spiritual. The editors structure the book around these four types: each of the four chapters focusing on a particular type of poverty.

In order to present the dense material in an accessible form, Munn-Venn and Snook give the chapters a consistent rhythm. A photograph and a Bible passage introduce the chapter's theme, followed by three devotionals, each including a personal essay written in a warm conversational tone, followed by discussion questions, creative group activities, and additional resources. Each lesson pushes Christians to seek justice, giving concrete responses groups can do to communally embody the lesson learned.

Throughout, the content remains accessible. It is obvious the editors had the same conversation with every contributor: the language is always succinct and direct, while retaining the unique personality and perspective of the author.

More impressive, though is the tone. Speaking about social justice can be tricky: one wants to communicate passion, but avoid alienating or accusing their audience. *Living Justice* quickly establishes a confident yet inviting tone filled with passion and humility.

It helps, too, that readers are not bludgeoned with facts and figures. Instead they are presented with stories. As the editors write, "Stories communicate not only to people's heads but to their hearts. Sharing stories can help to inform our own understanding of complex social issues – and their impacts – and they can motivate others to join our work of transformation" (76). Each devotional pushes the reader to contemplate the relationship between their own story and the story of *the other*, reminding us of our own poverty, convicting us of our role in others' poverty.

Uncomfortable truths yes, but I did not feel defensive; perhaps this is because when injustices are named there is feeling of communal confession.

Living Justice walks a fine line: those involved in the project want to push and prod the reader into action, and yet they are careful not to fall into an "us and them" posture; nor do they alienate readers who might be newer to social justice issues, especially ones fought on the national level.

It is risky, too, naming specific groups, declarations, campaigns, coalitions and governments within a devotional: explicitly connecting our communal faith to concrete politics easily causes discomfort.

May God bless us with discomfort at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships, so that we may live from deep within our hearts.

Yet in the end it is the gospel that pushes and prods us, makes us uncomfortable. Like a good preacher, the authors of *Living Justice* open the Word up to us and invite the Holy Spirit to move within us. After all, it is not the demeanor or tone of the person sharing the gospel that makes us squirm at our own complicity in the injustices of the world. As the final prayer in *Living Justice* reads: "May God bless us with discomfort at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships, so that we may live from deep within our hearts" (108).

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Features

The ultimate outsider

Will Braun

"As part of my probation conditions, I have to stay away from places where there are families," says Joe Patterson, "so that made finding a church hard." It didn't help that when he was released from prison, a local newspaper printed a full-page photo of Patterson along with his record of sexual offences against minors. The comment sections of news websites teemed with vitriol at the report of his re-entry into society.

Sitting at the kitchen table of his modest Winnipeg apartment, Patterson speaks without pretension, like someone who does not take for granted a second chance at life. His partner – who attends a United Church – sits on the couch nearby, typing on a laptop.

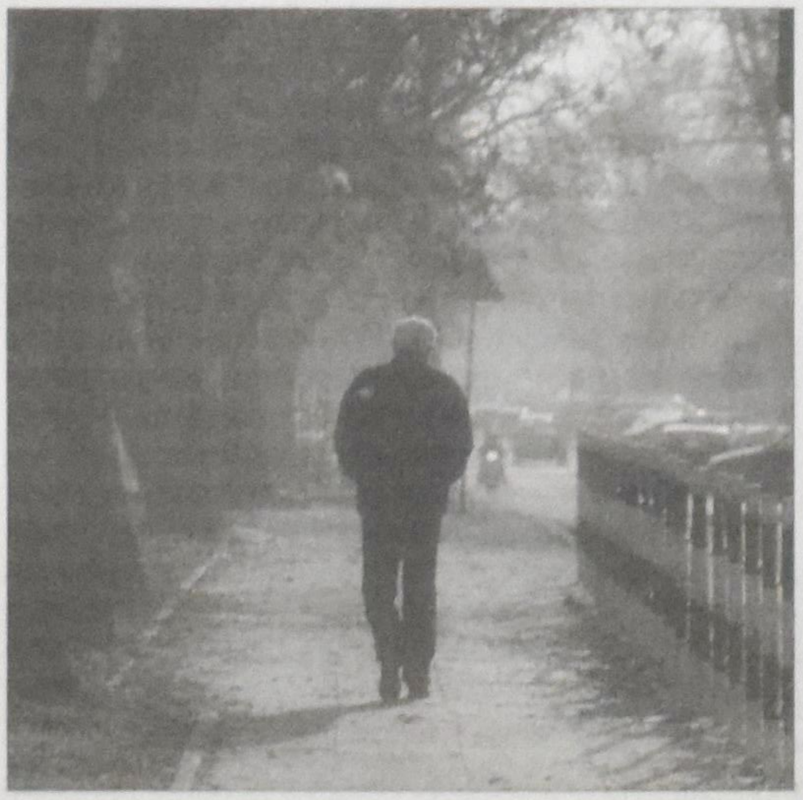
Having worked hard at rehabilitation while in prison, Patterson was eager to start over. But after his release, venturing into public, including to church, made him nervous. "Part of the challenge in reintegrating is facing the fear that no one is going to want to have anything to do with me," he says.

Society is primed to revile and fear people with histories of criminal offence, particularly those convicted of sex crimes against children. Most communities react with concern – or outright hostility – when they learn that a pedophile has moved into the neighbourhood. But fear left to fester serves no one, except perhaps politicians, who hope their tough-on-crime resolve will turn the dark sentiments of voters into their political gain. In Ottawa, the federal government is currently upping the toughness ante with a proposed crime bill that will make laws harsher, sentences longer and, presumably, public sentiment toward offenders more hostile.

Within faith communities, the presence of someone who has transgressed against society's most vulnerable can test the bounds of acceptance and inclusivity. And yet, some churches are choosing courage over fear and responding in a way that is both more merciful and more effective. They offer people with histories of criminal offence another chance, while still taking seriously the realities of evil.

"We're not here to judge or condemn anyone," says Pastor John Woodman of Grace Community Chapel (names have been changed and dates omitted to protect privacy). So when Patterson showed up at the church, Woodman considered it a "wonderful" chance to do what the church is called to do: welcome people. Jesus, Woodman notes, was a "friend of sinners."

Patterson chose the congregation based on the recommendation of a prison chaplain, who accompanied Patterson on his first visit to the church and disclosed his past to the pastor.



Though Woodman was immediately open to having Patterson in the pew, the decision to include him – ultimately made by the church council in consultation with parents – took a couple of months and numerous discussions. One concern was the desire to show sensitivity to victims of sexual assault. The larger concerns were those of parents.

One parent said initially he wanted to either "combat" the inclusion of a pedophile or find a new church. Over time, he realized that everyone needs community. Now he is "completely at ease" with Patterson's attendance and the "healthy boundaries" that have been created. Correctional Services required that two church members obtain approval to supervise Patterson. One of the two has to maintain visual contact with him when children are present.

Patterson, who came to faith in prison, has continued to attend the church, in between his studies and part-time work in the service sector. While he feels like a different person than the one who committed the offences, Patterson still chooses to avoid children in the congregation, partly out of respect for the parents and partly because of his determination not to "have any more victims." He says a broken childhood and a then-unacknowledged mental illness contributed to his crimes, but quickly adds that he takes full responsibility for his actions.

In prison, Patterson recognized that most of his fellow inmates had also suffered deep rejection in life. Their need for love, intimacy and belonging was not met in "normal" ways, so they turned elsewhere, he says. The societal rejection they experience when released makes them more likely to slip into old patterns.

That's why the acceptance of Grace church means so much to Patterson. He speaks of the church's inclusion of various people who could be considered modern-day lepers: "That kind of compassion really models the love of Christ," he says. "That's what I want to be a part of."

Though the congregation is part of an evangelical tradition often concerned with drawing borders between who is "in" and "out," Woodman takes a different view. "Who gives [us] the right to draw a line?" he asks. "If you've come here, you've already turned your face toward God." He quotes Jesus: "He who comes to me I will in no wise cast out."

Grace church is not alone. For example, in Manitoba, a handful of congregations, including a United Church one, knowingly welcome people with criminal records. Rev. Bruce Faurschou, who was a prison chaplain for over 20 years before becoming executive secretary of the United Church Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario, says evangelical churches have typically been more involved in this work than mainline denominations, though he notes that the United Church in Manitoba runs three halfway homes that help people transition from prison to society. Nationally, the United Church participates in the Church Council on Justice and Corrections, a coalition that promotes alternatives to the tough-on-crime trend.

In the United States, the birthplace of the tough-on-crime agenda, there are 762 inmates per 100,000 citizens, more than any other country (Canada's rate is 108 per 100,000). But Americans are realizing that the punitive approach cripples government budgets without making society safer. A 2010 New York Times editorial stated, "America's prison system is now studied largely because of its failure – the result of an expensive approach to criminal justice shaped by fear-driven ideology."

Even some Republicans, led by former speaker of the House of Representatives Newt Gingrich, are questioning the "lock 'em up and throw away the key" attitude that hard-nosed conservatives have long advocated. The website of Gingrich's Right on Crime initiative says, "An ideal criminal justice system works to reform amenable offenders." Recognizing that prison often exacerbates rather than breaks the cycle of crime, the initiative emphasizes flexible sentencing and treatment of offenders.

This new approach is visible in Texas, where officials hope to have 15,000 fewer people behind bars in 2012 than in 2007. Not only will this save Texas a projected $2 billion, but it has already contributed to the lowest crime rates in the state since 1973.

Canada, however, is headed in the opposite direction. Since the federal Conservatives took office in 2006, spending on Correctional Services has jumped from $1.6 billion to $2.98 billion a year, an increase of 87 percent. The figure is expected to rise to $3.15 billion by 2013-14 as the omnibus crime bill (if passed) will put an estimated 3,600 additional people in prison. All of this despite the fact that from 1998 to 2007, the crime rate dropped by 15 percent and the severity of crime by 21 percent (though nearly half of Canadians believe the opposite to be true).

Politicians of all parties "have told us for 15 years that [society] is a scary place," even though statistics show it is becoming safer, says Faurschou. The media often play along. In a Winnipeg Free Press article published last January, columnist Dan Lett confesses that even when crime rates go down, the media prefer to "reject all reasonable empirical arguments in favour of continued hysteria."

"Let's face it," Lett writes, "Canadians are junkies for crime rates." That is to say, we are junkies for fear.

But what exactly is the alternative to fear-driven ideology? While Grace Community Chapel exhibits a radically merciful attitude toward offenders, that alone is not enough to address what one expert calls "long-term, entrenched patterns of violent behaviour."

For 12 years, Joan Carolyn has helped people deemed a high risk to reoffend – including Joe Patterson – make the transition back into society. She offers no easy answers but a courageous and thorough approach that has proven helpful in some cases.

Carolyn heads the Winnipeg office of Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA), a gutsy little non-profit that works primarily with men who have sex offence histories. Upon release from prison, each of the men, or "core members," is surrounded with a "circle" of four to six supporters – mostly volunteers – who meet weekly. To qualify for COSA, a core member must show remorse and want help. In Manitoba, COSA currently has about 25 volunteers, an unadorned one-room office and seven circles, including Patterson's.

Weekly meetings are designed to nurture healthy relationships – something that may otherwise be absent – through activities like bowling, camping and birthday parties. They also involve candid discussions in which the

Features

core member has to own up to the damage he has done, put his "darkest secrets" on the table and face constant accountability, none of which necessarily happens in prison.

"I feel able to talk about anything," says Patterson of his weekly COSA sessions. For him, the basic affirmation provided by his circle is invaluable. "You get that negative message from society: 'I don't want you,'" he says. "COSA has been the opposite."

Carolyn says the COSA model – which took shape in Ontario in 1994 and has since led to the development of another 15 independent offices across the country – includes collaboration with parole workers, police, treatment professionals, social assistance networks and neighbourhood groups. Carolyn is adamant about sharing credit for any of COSA's success with these groups and with core members themselves.

While the various COSA offices originated with faith organizations, many have broadened their base. Carolyn says roughly half of her volunteers are from churches. Across Canada, various United Church congregations and members contribute to COSA, either financially or as volunteers.

The COSA approach is based on the philosophy of restorative justice, which was developed largely by Howard Zehr, a professor at Eastern Mennonite University in Virginia. In his groundbreaking 1990 book *Changing Lenses: A New Focus for Crime and Justice*, Zehr contrasts retributive justice, which focuses on blame and punishment, with an approach that involves all stakeholders in a process to restore wholeness to victims, offenders and communities.

Though steeped in the restorative approach, Carolyn is quick to point out that the "formal" (retributive) justice system and alternative systems must work together. In fact, a significant portion of her budget comes from Correctional Services. Carolyn also emphasizes the need to work with victim services agencies; the fundamental goal of COSA is "no new victims."

A Correctional Services survey found that two-thirds of core members felt they would have returned to crime without COSA. And yet, some core members do reoffend. "Never underestimate the power of evil," Carolyn says, before asserting her belief in the superior power of good. Since social isolation or a "downward spiral of behaviour" can trigger an offence, COSA volunteers are trained to identify warning signs. In some cases, volunteers and staff will encourage the core member to turn himself in and accompany him in doing so. At times, COSA staff have also reported core members against their wishes.

While COSA is not soft on crime, its toughness respects the inherent worth and dignity of every person. When Joan Carolyn says everyone is "created in God's image," she means it. At one point, her eyes fill with tears as she recalls the first time she saw a core member whom she had known for years enjoy life enough to actually laugh.

Demand for the program is high among those in prison, but the social climate of fear makes it hard to recruit enough volunteers to meet the demand.

While fearing sex offenders and wanting to lock up those who pose a risk is understandable, ultimately this approach may be counterproductive. Making a similar point in theological terms, one member of Grace Community Chapel says that while "isolating and scapegoating" people like Patterson may make us feel better, "it doesn't raise us or them to the potential God sees in us."

Howard Zehr emphasizes the importance of having a positive, constructive vision in addressing crime, something he says the punitive approach lacks. In an updated edition of his book *Changing Lenses*, he says restorative justice is an expression of the respect, humility and interconnectedness of all people, as well as an appreciation "of mystery, of ambiguity, of paradox, even of contradictions."

That mystery is made real every Sunday at the communion table of Grace Community Chapel, where everyone can partake in the broken body of Christ, and where Joe Patterson's offence matters less than his presence.

"We don't want to be famous as the church for ex-cons," says Woodman. "We just want to be the church."

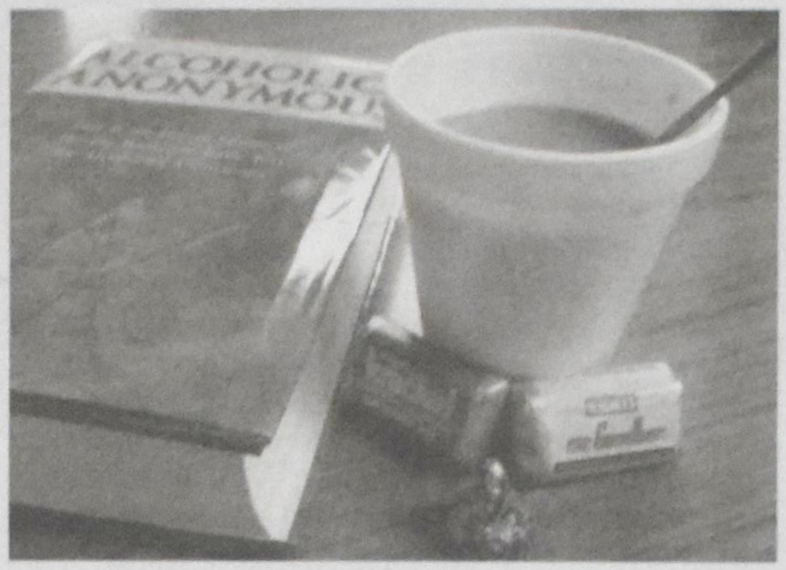
That's good news, both for Joe Patterson and for society as a whole.

Note: This article originally appeared in the *United Church Observer.* Reprinted with permission.

Will Braun (wbraun@inbox.com) is a Winnipeg writer whose work appears in various faith publications in Canada and the U.S.

'Why can't the church be more like AA?'

Paul VanderKlay



In my congregation a good friend of mine is a recovering alcoholic with over 35 years of sobriety. He took to AA like a fish takes to water and worked his program within AA for a lot of years, getting his medallions, going to meetings, etc. He often asks me the question, "Why can't the church be more like AA?"

He no longer attends AA meetings. He's at a level where meeting attendance hasn't been necessary to maintain sobriety. Whereas he believes in "the program" to the depths of his soul and loves to meet other "friends of Bill" and talk the recovery code talk, he knows why he no longer goes to meetings. He's "been there, done that" all before. He's heard all the "drunk-a-logues" before, done the whole thing. He stopped going because he didn't need it any longer to "restore sanity to his life."

His persistent question of "Why can't the church be more like AA?" continues to linger in our conversations. We want the church to be a place where sinners don't need to hide. We want the church to be a therapeutic community where people can be set free from their bondages to sin and addiction and find lives of sobriety and freedom. We want churches to be places where there are no barriers, places where PhDs can break bread with the illiterate, where millionaires call those who live in group homes "brother" and "sister." By God's grace, *Living Stones CRC* is a place where these things are true at some level, but it's never enough.

When my friend asks, "Why can't the church be more like AA?" he wants a place that doesn't need all the overhead the church has. AA runs by borrowing space and just needing someone to organize and govern the meeting and put on a pot of coffee. The rules and rituals of the Big Book and other traditions govern and the thing moves forward. And it works if you work the program as he keeps telling me.

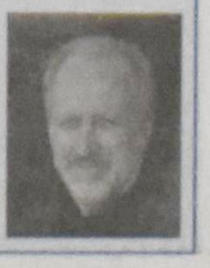
My response to my friend usually begins with this observation: AA has the benefit of being a single-focus organization. At least initially, you can be a thief, a wife-beater, or an ax murderer, but as long as you can keep away from drinking, you have a level of acceptance in the group. Now I know that, if you work your steps, you have to address the other ways that you are wronging others, but there is a way in which isolating the focus of dysfunction down to one specific problem helps the group stay tolerant in a way that no church ever could.

I have no argument with those who note that in many respects 12 step programs outperform the church. What I don't think is true is that we can equate the task of the church with the task of 12 step programs. 12 step programs are wonderfully Christian tools to address specific manifestations of our brokenness and they can be highly effective in what they set out to do. They are often MORE effective than general spiritual disciplines (attending worship, small groups, personal Bible study, prayer, sacraments) at rooting out stubborn and devastating patterns of behavior. We should praise God that we have more tools rather than fewer. At the same time the difference in performance between these two things may illuminate the difference in task.

What this may mean is that not all sinners are addicts, while all addicts remain sinners even when they are in recovery. The vocabulary of the 12 step movement is enormously Christian and bears within it enormous wisdom. The 12 step movement shines a light on the nature of sin in a way that all sinners, whether or not they would clinically be diagnosed as "addicts," can benefit from. However, if all the world's addicts were 100 percent in recovery from all the world's addictions, sin and brokenness would remain, still needing the intervention of the King of kings.

An addict's recovery is a subset, a sign and a manifestation of the deliverance announced in Nazareth in Luke 4 thousands of years ago, whether or not that addict has ever known or expresses any allegiance to Jesus. In the church such deliverances should be celebrated and recognized as such. If the Bible is like a pair of glasses, as John Calvin said, allowing us to see ourselves more clearly and see God more clearly, it should also help us see individual expressions of deliverance more clearly still. Those expressions of deliverance don't exhaust the breadth and fullness of the deliverance proclaimed. They exist just like any of the innumerable healings of innumerable individuals done by Jesus and his disciples never individually detailed in the New Testament.

There are enough needs and contexts to justify many different kinds of churches with different kinds of emphases. I also want us to see, however, that the breadth and scope of the deliverance announced by Jesus and commissioned by him to be announced by his disciples is always beyond that which we imagine and realize. We are blessed to have the 12 step movement and 12 step emphasis churches just like we are blessed to have other movements and other churches that express those emphases, but no single movement or emphasis exhausts or fully embodies the deliverance announced and proclaimed by the one who claimed all authority in heaven and on earth.



Paul VanderKlay is the pastor of Living Stones CRC in Sacramento, California. He blogs at ***Leadingchurch.com*** *and hosts the Classis Discussion Forum at network.**crcna.org**.*

Features

CC is pleased to present a four-part series on the topic of pacifism.Our guest writers offer perspectives that are independent of each other and provide a dynamic cross-disciplinary juxtaposition. Bert den Boggende, historian, takes us through the centuries, surveying Christian attitudes about pacifism. Brent van Staalduinen, writer, offers reflection and opinion based on his experiences in the military and teaching overseas in Kuwait and South Korea. We encourage our readers to offer their feedback by way of a letter to the editor (editor@christiancourier.ca) or comments online at **christiancourier.ca**.

Christian pacifism: boots on the ground

Brent van Staalduinen

I left the Canadian Forces (CF) in 1994, when the Somalia Affair and the UN's failures in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda were making news and casting shadows across Canada's military. I remember this time very keenly; I joined the reserves as a medical assistant before my last year of high school and had carried on through my first year of college. I had been thinking of putting myself on the UN peacekeeping list; at the time, due particularly to the civil war in the former Yugoslavia, demand for reservists was high and it was very likely that I would have been given the opportunity to serve with the UN had I stayed in the CF. I had a number of friends do UN tours overseas, and their dedication was inspiring.

Then something shifted. Somalia. Bosnia/Croatia. Rwanda. Even day-to-day training and operations in my unit were affected by a hyper-awareness of outside opinion. Morale in the ranks, already savaged by governmental budget cuts, was sinking fast. Public scrutiny was extreme, and citizens debated the merits of overseas missions while largely plugging their ears to what those in uniform – the boots on the ground – were saying. My friends returned from overseas as changed people, to a country that acted ashamed of their contributions, and did not talk much about their experiences except with other soldiers. People didn't ask, either – to many, there are very few shades of military green.

It was a terrible time to be in uniform in Canada.

Almost twenty years on, though, morale in the CF and public opinion of our military seems to be much improved, largely due to the excellent conduct and performance of our military in Afghanistan and improved support from politicians on all sides of Parliament. The ghosts of the scandals that eviscerated public opinion towards the CF in the 90's have largely been silent. Veterans of Afghanistan return to us, to their units and families, having accomplished something tangible and real, even though the price has been so very, very high.

It is impossible to measure success or failure when it comes to the costs of combat. War, in whatever form, always casts a shadow on those who participate in it. Soldiers are never the same when they return – the physical and psychological trauma often outpaces the lessons that have been paid in blood. Those wounds bleed on others as well: politicians distance themselves from the stained policies of former governments; citizens debate the campaign's success or failure based on the media's grainy visages of controversy rather than listening to those who were there; most painfully, the soldiers' families bring them home to await, in solitude and often silence, what cost their sons' and daughters' service might demand.

Reality and abstraction

There is a very real danger that the returning soldier will be the oft-ignored casualty when churches and governments and citizens dissect the motives for going to war. Thankfully, I haven't heard of people spitting on our veterans, but I have heard disparaging comments from fellow Christians about the men and women who choose to put on the uniform. "Christian Pacifism" can become a mantra as arguments progress, with abstract theology used to justify the vilification of the choices and actions of soldiers.

Do we tear apart those who choose to put themselves between the bad things in the world and those who enjoy freedom? Ignore all the examples in scripture of soldiering under the banner of faith and the love Christ clearly shows to those who choose to render unto Caesar by being the sharp end of the spear? Use terms like "just or unjust war" and "defensive actions only" that sail straight past the reality that someone, somewhere, must pick up a rifle to protect the very existence of those discussions?

There is no more noble decision – no greater love – than the choice to lay down one's life for a friend, brother, parent, stranger, child. When a person chooses to put on a uniform and pick up a weapon and then travels to far-off places to give others a chance at the incredible life we enjoy so casually, they do so knowing they might have to lay down their lives. They also go in the knowledge that they might have to make life or death decisions to protect those who cannot protect themselves.

In my opinion, there can be no other response than to honour those who choose that sacrifice with our words and actions. We have thousands of men and women right here in Canada – and in our churches and homes – who have returned and will return as veterans. More than a few will have faced the reality of taking the life of a fellow human being and, while taking life is never something to be celebrated, the choice to stand in that place in our stead must be.

I wrestle with abstract discussions about the rightness or wrongness of war – my experiences may be too concrete and practical. Difficult for me, also, is the dissection of military campaigns when the reasons for their critique remain in the clouds, where theology and isolated bits of scripture provide "evidence" for or against the choices we make to war or not to war. It's not that those discussions should or should not take place – they absolutely should – but when the critique uses intangible ideals or morals as the measuring tool to pass judgment on those who choose to put on the uniform, there exists the real danger of stepping outside our mandate.

When we argue in our homes and churches the justness of war and military assignments, debate foreign policy, call ourselves pacifist or non-pacifist with passion and fervour, we sometimes do so unaware of the impact of the harsh words we bear. I pray we remember Christ's mission and call to love. And that must include those who choose to serve.

Read more about Brent van Staalduinen and his work at brentvans.com. He lives in Hamilton, Ontario.

Pacifism in the Old Testament and early church

Bert den Boggende

Christian pacifism is much misunderstood. Except for a few texts, Mennonites and Quakers, among others, have generally ignored the Old Testament in their arguments propounding pacifism. However, it contains significant clues that should not be ignored.

The Old Testament

Many Old Testament documents seem to present God as a war god, but it is questionable whether all these wars may be ascribed to Yahweh. Ancient Near Eastern peoples also formally justified war with a divine will. In *Yahweh is a Warrior* (1980) Mennonite scholar Millard C. Lind casts a new light on this dominant militarist Old Testament strand. Early biblical documents, he suggests, show that Yahweh fought in a peculiar way when the Israelites fled Egypt and entered Canaan. Gradually God's way was replaced by human ways and initiatives. Lind's research leads to the proposition that war is Yahweh's prerogative and that people have arrogated that prerogative.

A minor strand becomes apparent with Samuel's objection to monarchy. Having a king not only denied supra-national salvation but also necessarily implied warfare, which the prophets condemned. Amos stated, "The archer will not stand his ground, the fleet-footed soldier will not get away, and the horseman will not save his life. Even the bravest warriors will flee naked on that day" (2:15-16). Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Micah and Zechariah condemned chariots and fortifications as abominations and abhorred foreign alliances. They indicated that war was a reliance on one's own strength from which the people needed to repent. In the stories of Ruth and Jonah there are hints of universalism that break through the confines of such nationalism.

This condemnation of war can be connected to the Hebrew word *shalom*, a broad word that includes physical safety, seeking the welfare of others, harmony, concord, and spiritual well-being. This gift of God is foreshadowed in the announcement of the coming Prince of Peace (Is. 9:6, cf. Mi. 5:5), who will ensure that the nations "will beat their swords into ploughshares" (Is.2:2-4; Mi. 4:1-4) and that "the wolf will live with the lamb" (Is. 11:1-9). Zechariah 9:9 announced that this Prince of Peace would enter Jerusalem riding on a donkey, a rejection of the horse, a military weapon. Isaiah and Micah not only indicate what the future will be like but also what the past was (paradise) and what the present should have been. Thus, the Old Testament already hints at what the Christian's model should be.

The New Testament

The New Testament does not explicitly condemn war, but God's peculiar way of battling is best exemplified in Jesus. At his birth the angels sing of "peace on earth." Jesus' third temptation, the vision of all the world's kingdoms, implied the way of war and is rejected. When Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey, he fulfilled Zechariah's prophecy. He warns that those taking up the sword must perish by it (Mt. 26:52). God's way of battling is not the way of the Zealots but of the cross. The closest the New Testament comes to condemning war is found in James 4: killing, fighting and quarrelling come from coveting, from not having what one wants.

World War I pacifists usually referred to the Sermon on the Mount as the basis of their pacifism, regarding it as something like the "constitution" of God's kingdom. From this positive perspective the absence of a full condemnation of war was not so important. While an upcoming article will indicate the shortcoming of this perspective, note that Jesus' followers are called to turn the other cheek, to love their enemies and to be peacemakers. Nowhere are they called to be warriors. As John 18:36 suggests, God's kingdom must not be advanced by physical force.

If the Sermon on the Mount is the key text, love is the key word. Christian pacifist literature is replete with it. For pacifists, killing is incompatible with loving one's neighbour.

The early church

The early church regarded the conquest of evil through war power unacceptable.

Columns

From the 11th Province

Marian Van Til

Rejoice! Embrace another year of grace

We finite human creatures are inextricably tied to time, times, seasons and cycles. We can't escape – our romantic, adventurous notions of time travel, "worm holes" and molecule-scrambling transporters *à la* Star Trek notwithstanding.

It seems to me that an integral part of our "hours-and-days-and-years-and-ages" nature (as New Year's hymn #443 in the *Psalter Hymnal* puts it) involves a year's end/year's beginning reflection on where we've been and where we're going. That's what I feel the urge to do; and the common notion of New Year's resolutions tells me that my reaction is part of a universal human impulse. The fact that the hymn I quoted was written in the 18th century by a Dutchman, to a Moravian tune, is another clue to the universality of an annual urge to reflect, accompanied by a yearning for renewal.

For us Christians such thoughts must surely include reevaluating the state of our faith: Where am I on the road to sanctification? Have I, asking God's help, moved further down that road in the last year? Am I trusting him more and more, in and for all things? And are all of us Christ-believers communally doing the same?

I find that I tend to carry on such reflection throughout all of January. It may take that long to get my thinking re-ordered and to relinquish bad habits and attitudes, and even to readjust my worldview so that it remains (or becomes) as biblical as possible. The Lord well knows I can be a stubborn case!

It strikes me that the first act resulting from our reflection should be repentance. Another New Year's hymn acknowledges that: "Greet the swiftly changing year with joy and penitence sincere" (Ps. H. # 444, 16th c. Slovak text). Though redeemed, we are a fallen people living in a fallen world and disobedience to God comes all too naturally to us (cf. St. Paul's "the good that I want to do I do not do..." Romans 7:14). It is instructive that this hymn phrase links joy and repentance. Repenting of sin is a Spirit-prompted reaching out to be put right with God, and God *always* welcomes and re-welcomes us with open arms when we plead for his mercy. What could bring us greater joy?

Exceeding the volume of our needs

Both of the hymns cited relay other biblical truths. Part of our penitential joy comes from reflecting on how Christ shed his blood for us, says the Slovak hymn. His broken body reveals his profound, description-defying love for us. In short: Jesus came to "end sin's war" – granting us peace. If we had somehow forgotten, the hymn prompts us to recall that such love "far exceeds the volume of a whole year's needs." Did we have a prosperous year or did we lose a job or even our home? In any circumstance, if the Lord is leading us "what need we fear in earth or space in this new year of grace"?

There are more deeply biblical elements in this hymn. It urges both exultation and thankfulness.

Whether in joy or sorrow, prosperity or want, with every stanza we agree to "Rejoice! With thanks embrace another year of grace." And then, acknowledging again that the new year is ours because of his grace, we give God the glory that is rightly his (echoing the angels' song), and we ask his blessing as Triune God on our new year.

Despite God's grace surrounding us and upholding us moment by moment, it is not hard, given our "old nature" of sin, to fear what is to come in a new year. If that is true in our personal lives it is certainly more true when we look at the increasing dangers for, and persecution of, Christians in the greater world. But the author of "Hours and Days and Years and Ages" reminds us that despite danger threatening to overwhelm us, despite raging sorrow, despite the ages moving swiftly as shadows and our own lives dissolving into "fleeting pages," despite evil circumstances that seem to clamp us in their grasp, and even "though all friends on earth forsake us and our troubles still increase," time's marching on will not – *cannot* – "decide our end." We know who does decide our end (and beginning, and middle, and every second of each year he gives us till we draw our last breath): "God our Father will remain, always changeless, come what may."

St. Paul puts it this way:

In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither life nor death, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate use from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:37-38).

So: "Rejoice! With thanks embrace another year of grace"!

Marian Van Til is a church musician, freelance writer-editor and former CC editor. She and her husband live in Youngstown, N.Y. They began the year in sorrow over the death of their handsome, sweet-tempered 17-year-old "Narnian" cat, Caspian. But they give thanks that God created such marvelous creatures.

Artful Eye

Painting by Melani Pyke: Psalm 86: My God.

Those hands you gave me

When I look at my hands, I see you.
Of all the billions of hands you created, you gave me these.
Thank you. I rather like them.

You gave other lovely gifts.
Like a laugh that emerges at the most serious of times,
That's a favorite of mine.
Or wakening with a new melody in my head ...
Oh, that is a kiss from you.

Did I mention the lavender sky you sent with the extraordinary breeze?
Only you would truly know how much I adore purple.

You've taken my heart splinters that have come along the way,
Melded and shaped them into trophies.
You let me surrender my shrapnel for hints of gold.

If I could send a love note back to you,
I would love you by being still.
And those fine hands you gave me
Would be reaching like a child to you.

Tricia Noble

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Pacifism....*continued from p. 12*

Such opposition to war questioned the rightness of an army, an idea unthinkable to the rest of the ancient world, which regarded peace as the product of victory won (or lost) by the soldier. Christians judged military action as contrary to the command to love. Military service was rejected because the military oath had a pagan religious character incompatible with obedience to God and, in addition, officers were required to offer sacrifices to the emperor. Moreover, Rome was perceived as the perpetrator of the persecution of Christians.

In the 170s the Platonic philosopher Celsus complained that if everyone imitated the Christian attitude there would be no army to protect the empire. Nevertheless, the first surviving evidence that there were Christians in the army dates roughly from this time. Church leaders now began speaking out against such involvement. According to the African theologian Tertullian, Jesus, in disarming Peter, unarmed every soldier. The historian and apologist Lactantius held that it was not lawful for a just man to engage in warfare. The Roman presbyter Hippolytus held that a volunteer who became a soldier should be rejected as a catechumen. The Alexandrian theologian Origen regarded Christians as an army of piety fulfilling Is. 2: 3-4. Against accusations that Christians were isolationists, other-worldly, ascetic, and idealistic, church leaders argued that Christ had commanded them to be perfect.

After 180 there was an increase of Christian soldiers, but apparently they were not allowed to participate in the Lord's Supper. A significant change came one year after Constantine's victory in 313 when the Council of Arles decreed that soldiers laying down their arms in peace time should abstain from communion. The decree set the church on the road to a just war position.

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Columns

Everyday Christian

Cathy Smith

Glory at home

Very few books have actually made me weep because they were so beautiful. *Godric* by Frederick Buechner was one. I read it twice and wept both times. *Gilead* by Marilynne Robinson was another. And now, *Home*, also by Robinson. Its luminous hopefulness, centred in the home, ennobling "women's work," also makes me cry.

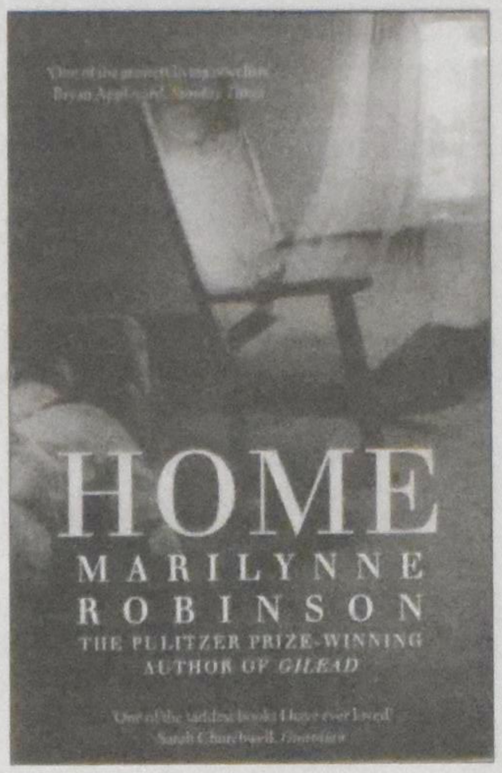
Marilynne Robinson has been in the news a lot. She's an articulate defender of Christianity and capable critic of those vociferous New Atheists. I was fortunate enough to hear her speak at the 2006 Calvin College Festival of Faith and Writing. It occurred to me then that I had never, ever before heard a woman speak with such grace, intellectual authority and cultural acumen. I was mesmerized.

I took notes. "Books have potency," she said, quoting Milton's *Areopagitica*. Books can show you your own soul. Reading a novel is a solitary experience akin to prayer and meditation. In our culture, she continued, there is a loss of respect for that kind of inwardness. Our culture has become "decadently rationalistic." She reflected on the legacy of an old copy of King Lear that she read under the blankets when it was past her bedtime. It had, she said, "an honourable weariness about it, having passed through innumerable hands." Books, she asserted, have brought more freedom into the world than perhaps we were even able to handle.

In all the reviews I've read of Robinson's *Home*, not one writer has quite zeroed in on what captivated me about this novel. So, I guess I have to write about it myself. Please insert a smiley face, here, as together we wryly enjoy the chutzpah of that sentence.

Robinson's use of homemaking as a metaphor for the work that God does is subtle, original and affirming. I adore the fact that the main character, a woman who has come home in quiet disgrace after a grievous relationship with a married man, is called, absurdly and triumphantly, Glory. As she tends first to her ailing father, Rev. Boughton, succumbing to infirmity and age, and then also to her recovering alcoholic brother Jack, Glory is the centre of this home, doing all the background tasks that women do, sweeping, making coffee, doing laundry, trying to restore the garden.

She worries and prays and cares for these two men without bringing up her own heartbreak. Repeatedly she sets aside her own tiredness, frustration and sorrow to reach out and salve their wounds – her brother's "inaccessible strangeness," her father's need for comfort and dignity in his dying. Glory "was wary indeed of certain thoughts, certain memories, because her father could not bear her unhappiness." Through her sensitivity to their pain, through the ministrations of her hands in the home, we witness and touch the cost of caring.



Ministry in the mundane

Glory, who has a career in teaching and Master's degree in Literature, muses at one point that she might have chosen the ministry had she been a man. But "she seemed always to have known that, to their father's mind, the world's great work was the business of men … Women were creatures of a second rank, however pious, however beloved, however honored." With the gravest and gentlest kind of irony it becomes apparent that Glory is a messianic maid, her lowly service in the home blessing the two troubled men, providing them with anointed fragments of grace and peace.

Robinson's adept descriptions wrap the house and its furnishings, the yard, and the outbuildings with sacredness. The oak tree in the front yard "makes rubble of the pavement at its foot" and flings "imponderable branches out over the road." The "torsion in its body made it look like a giant dervish to them." That tree, older than the neighbourhood or town, becomes more than itself, hinting at that "other" tree of religious ecstasy. The homely objects and familiar trappings of the house become vessels for something greater – human and even divine love. Glory ponders the character of the house, with its "staunch" and "brokenhearted" presence. She consciously puts aside wistful visions of someday having her own home or her own children. She commits to preserving this home and what it represents, its rootedness and its tender way of tying down *belonging* to a concrete place, for the future, for Jack's son.

Glory does what she can for those she loves. She bakes pies and scrubs the stains out of Jack's shirt. It's the transcendence Robinson situates in the daily mundane sacrifices that are required to run a home that gets me choked up. The daily setting aside of self for the elderly and hurting. Christ-likeness in dusting and peeling potatoes. I look at my mom and the thousands of women like her who had fewer choices than I did, who for generations did what they could with all they had, often not very much, to minister to their families in the home. Marilynne Robinson's book is good news for them.

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Getting Unstuck

Arlene Van Hove

Stuck in patterns and cycles?

When we are in conflict with someone, how often don't we resort to the blame game? It's not me, we insist, it's you! After a while, the steps and pattern become automatic. To change the habit we need insight into the communication dynamics that keep us in this cycle. We also need to recognize that breaking the cycle will take some effort.

Q. I am not sure what is wrong in my marriage. When my spouse and I have to sort out our differences we quickly get into a pattern or cycle of blaming each other for whatever is or is not happening. After we have made mincemeat of one another we withdraw into our own corner of the house for whatever time it takes to nurse our wounds. Years ago, it used to take a day or two for us to get over it. But as time went on our arguments resulted in days or weeks of silence. (I do want to stress that there is no physical violence in our relationship).

The last year has been different. Whenever our discussions become heated I bail and tell my spouse I am not doing this anymore. Needless to say not much is being resolved around our house in the last while, but then nothing much was ever resolved anyway.

Since I began bailing out we have had fewer arguments. But now there is a distance between us that is not easily scaled. Also, I'm finding that I like the separation between my spouse and myself. Not as much gets my goat anymore and so my life is more peaceful.

We have been married for 29 years and are both in our mid fifties. The last of our three children has left the family home and my spouse and I are pretty much stuck with one another. I say this with tongue in cheek, of course. In reality, my faith has not only helped me be patient with myself as well as my spouse, it has also encouraged me to stay hopeful for the future. But I make no bones about wanting to eventually slide into a peaceful retirement because I still love my spouse a lot.

R. You probably did yourself and your spouse a favour – if only for a time – by bailing out of your arguments. It has given both of you a chance to take a deep breath and realize how your process was not working. You might also have raised your tolerance level since not as much "gets your goat anymore." While some distance between spouses can be healthy, the challenge is not to alienate one another. And so, I would suggest you make sure you do something together that enhances your relationship.

At the same time, contemporary marriages are about developing and nurturing an emotional bond. This bond is about *being there for one another in a safe, dependable and consistent way* throughout the challenges of life. In other words, spouses have one another's backs, as the popular saying goes. Heated arguments or weeks of silence damage the emotional bond between spouses and sow seeds of doubt whether they will be there for one another in times of need.

In your case, while learning the ropes of conflict resolution might be helpful at a later date, I suggest you and your spouse first get a good grip on understanding the importance of the emotional bond in marriage and how to nurture this bond over time.

A good beginning to this work would be to read *Hold Me Tight: Seven Conversations for a Lifetime of Love*, by Sue Johnson. You will recognize yourself in her writings. She labels the pattern you are stuck in "Find the Bad Guy." Blaming, according to her, can be a form of self-protection and an attempt to stay in control. The dynamics are attack and accusations. And, of course, emotional safety is lost.

Cyclical behaviour can be hard for a couple to get out of, but the effort is worthwhile and necessary to nurture a loving relationship.

Because your pattern and cycles are so habitual I also suggest you connect with a pastor or a Christian therapist who has knowledge of the Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy Model. Studies have shown that this model has become the most successful approach to nurturing loving relationships.

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Columns

Gathering Light

Emily Wierenga

Resolving to love

Emily Wierenga

I grip it like a kite, the patch of blue outside my window. It's the same kite I flew when I was in labour and now, seared by the birthing pains, I tend both children teething and sick with colds.

I stand by the window all cry-eyed and bone-tired and I wonder at the bigness required of a mother. The strength needed to turn myself inside out, minute by hour, in search of wisdom, empathy, Kleenex and a lap. When is it my turn?

My 23-month-old has broken another DVD unintentionally and it's broken me and I've cried in front of him and now he's sobbing in the living room and me, here, by the window when baby Kasher begins to weep from the swing.

It's the same story of lost perspective. And then I hear it. The hard patter of little feet, running, pausing, running, pausing. I let go of my kite to find my baby with a soother in his mouth, toys piled 'round and blankets, so many blankets and Aiden's patting Kasher's stomach because he can't find his back. And Kasher's quiet now.

And then I find it. The love that gives perspective. I find it in the heart of my son. A boy who, sobbing, heard the cries of another, and ran. A boy who brought blanket after blanket and made me see that I need not be bigger. I need not be a giant of strength. I need only be a child.

This becoming like a child is something I'm resolving to do in 2012.

I've never been good at resolutions, so I'm making just one this year. It's a decision inspired by the story of Amanda Lindhout, a girl raised in the First Christian Reformed Church of Red Deer, Alberta. Lindhout, a freelance journalist in Somalia, one of the world's most dangerous countries, was kidnapped by a group of teenaged boys and imprisoned in August 2008. In spite of being abused daily for 15 months in a pitch-black cell, Lindhout resolved, upon her release, to help her abusers.

She resolved, in short, to love.

Amanda Lindhout is a Canadian journalist who was kidnapped and abused while working in Somalia. After her release, Lindhout returned to Somalia and founded a program that seeks to educate Somali youth.

"I've never questioned whether or not it was the right thing to do," Lindhout told CBC's *The National*, after developing The Global Enrichment program – a humanitarian initiative that seeks to educate Somali youth. "What else to do after the experience that I had, than something like this?"

Oh, to have such vision. Selfishness, for Lindhout, was not even an option. And I think of my son. I think of his feet pitter-pattering hard across the floor, his own face streaked with tears but running, fast, to the sound of his brother's cries. He'd forgotten his own suffering in light of another's.

What will it take for me to get my eyes off my own reflection? I've tried reducing the number of mirrors in my house. But then there are windows and television screens and everywhere I turn, there I am. Amanda had no reflections. Just darkness. I wonder if I'm willing to go to that extent? Am I that committed to learning love?

I catch another glimpse of myself in the window as I rock my baby and I look older than I've ever looked, hair tied back, glasses, apron for the baking and all of me, mother. I look like a mother. And I like it.

I've been missing them lately. My children. Which is strange because I'm always with them. But part of me is always somewhere else, and that part of me will never have this time back. These holy moments at home when it's mama and boys and toys and stories. Sometimes the days seem long – but the years are short.

After the fact, I'll wish for it all back. For longer dances and more kisses. Soon they'll be in school and all I'll see is their tiny back-packs as they bike with Daddy down the road to kindergarten. And so I'm slowing. I'm pausing, waiting, coaxing the seed out of its shell, the miracle that I so desperately long for: love. And I find it in the eyes of my children – pupils fresh from heaven.

So I'm resolving this year to spend more time looking into their faces. More time seeing *him* in their blue eyes. The God who is love. It's a love that gives perspective, and it's a perspective I cling to as my kite soars high.

Emily Wierenga is an author, artist and freelance writer who lives with her husband and sons in Neerlandia, Alberta. For more information, please visit ***emilywierenga.com****.*

Our World Today

Bert Hielema

Thoughts on the New Year

We are now well into 2012. Some people associate the year 2012 with disaster, thanks to a movie by that name, which in 2009 predicted that this year the earth will be struck by calamities so immense that only a few will survive. However, just as George Orwell's prophesies for 1984 – written in 1949 – did not come to pass in that year, so 2012 will not see the world turn upside down even though there are signs that not all is well in the Western world.

Perhaps a phenomenon called "collective consciousness" might play a role: if enough people believe that something disastrous will happen, it just might, no doubt influenced by the bad news out there. Just look at the monetary system: it's not too far-fetched to believe that the entire banking business might collapse someday. John Kenneth Galbraith, in *The Great Crash, 1929*, called the chapter preceding THE CRASH "The Twilight of Illusion."

It seems to me that today we live not in the twilight but in the dark night of illusion, brought on by our pious faith in perpetual progress – the "unknown known" which simply ignores the everyday realities of diminishing returns and limits to growth – and by our stubborn belief that the future will always be better than the past. That's why we have allowed trillion dollar deficits, and convinced ourselves that our pollution problems will be solved with improved technology. Curing debt with more debt and treating pollution – caused by technology – with more of the same, reminds me of Matthew 12 where Jesus was accused of driving out demons in the name of the prince of demons.

As we go deeper into the teenage years of this century, it becomes increasingly clear that this will be a decade of deleveraging: we're in for at least 10 years of paying off over-due bills that we've pushed aside while waiting for economic growth that refuses to come. Debts are always paid, either through inflation with money of less value – the more likely scenario – or deflation, which brings lower prices and wages. Both scenarios signal hardship. Paying for our climate overshoot will result in more floods, more ice storms, more tree-breaking winds, more drought and failed crops and increasing living costs everywhere.

A Great Depression-era soup kitchen. The historian John Kenneth Galbraith referred to the period before the stock market crash of 1929 as "the twilight of illusion."

Advice for the young

Sorry, young people. Just as the Roman Catholic church keeps on apologizing for sexual crimes, we, older people, must keep on saying sorry for leaving you with an immense mess: a world changed beyond recognition in which species disappear at a rate 1,000 times faster than before, and in which everything we've taught you – based on our life-style – is vanishing before your eyes. We still piously sing "This is our Father's World," but we, at best, have treated his world with callous indifference. Don't repeat our mistakes. Don't make money your goal. Instead, handle our living planet with the reverence it deserves.

Keep healthy habits: run, walk, bike, ski. It isn't for nothing the Bible emphasizes that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. I know you young can take a lot of abuse, but there always is a price to pay. Poor diets, watching too much TV and sitting too long in front of a computer screen may not kill you, but these habits will lead to decades of chronic disease. Prevention is better than curing, especially as future health-care dollars will become far less plentiful. Choose a mate with extreme care and seek to be part of a viable community.

Don't rush into anything. Christians have eternal life, and, as Revelation 14:13, says "Your deeds will follow you in the New Creation." So investigate everything, and discover what has lasting value. Remember Creation is God's primary word. The best way to love God is to love creation. Treat her with all the care you can muster, for our health depends on her health. Oil-based enterprise is no longer the answer because of its toxicity. Renewal is the key, which is also the key ingredient of the New Creation. Happiness is to be "in the Lord." It means to be consciously busy to seek the best for people and the earth.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes in *Creation and Fall*, "Without God, without our brother and sister, we lose the earth (because) … God, brother and sister, and the earth belong together." We are in the earth, of the earth. The sum total of being a creature is that we completely belong to this world, because it bears us, it nurtures us and embraces us. Any heaven-oriented teaching is from the devil, because it denies God's very Word of creation.

Bert Hielema lives in rural Tweed, Ontario where he tries to practise what he preaches (of which he does too much).

Columns

Words from Wild Horses

Kenny Warkentin

Longings of the heart

As always when I enter the New Year, I look back at the past year to re-evaluate goals and write down dreams and visions for the future. I try to recall significant things that meant a lot to me or caused me to see things differently. This past year was difficult in many ways, but I was encouraged and challenged and drawn closer to God by his amazing love. As I reflect on the past year, I ask myself questions such as: How fully do I give my thoughts and feelings over to God? Do my thoughts, feelings, desires line up to the word of God? Are the thoughts that I think or even the desires that I have good? Who am I listening to, and am I drawn to self sufficiency and idol worship?

I recall hearing someone share about the seven longings of the human heart. I can't remember who was speaking, but their words were profound for me. I ended up coming away from that weekend conference with more clarity, a hunger and thirst to run toward righteousness, and a desire to want more spiritual growth. Here are the seven longings that I wrote down:

1. **That God really enjoys us (me)**: Ephesians 3:16-20, pray this every day until it clicks within you. Nourish your relationship with God/Jesus/Holy Spirit, and come to know that God doesn't just love me, he also likes me.
2. **Longing to be fascinated**: humans grasp at anything that fascinates us. In our broken state we jump at that which gives us pleasure, be it physically, sexually, emotionally. My prayer is that the Lord will show me his GLORY; try praying this daily.
3. **Longing to be beautiful**: we have a longing to be desired, liked by others. We need a deep connection to the fact that God sees us as beautiful so we don't feel the need to do things just so that people like us.
4. **Longing to be great**: we long for more, we long for greatness, and often we try to get these things in the world. We should desire for greatness in the kingdom of Heaven. Paul's focus was on rewards in heaven, and, yes, there are rewards waiting for us. I desire to be as close to God as possible.
5. **Intimacy without shame**: long for the stability of love; to boldly go into the throne room of grace, and to come before God without shame and to love others without shame.
6. **Long to be whole-hearted and passionate**: everyone's inner soul longs to worship and love God. That is how we are formed. We all have a deep inner voice that longs to worship God. We often do not take time to listen, to nurture that deep inner call. Instead we fill this longing with work, relationships, shopping, eating and sex, anything that takes us away from sitting in his presence.
7. **Long to make an impact**: we want relevance, we want to impact others. All I want to hear is "well done good and faithful servant." God wants to remove all the things that hinder our cries and longings.

I've come to know that it's not always easy to walk in relationship with God. He will challenge me, refine me and draw me deeper into relationship with him. It is all about him and his desire for a deeper and more relevant relationship with me. I often run when there is pain, or when I don't "feel" God. During times of the dark night of the soul, I need to press deeper into my relationship with God, even when I do not feel like pressing in. When I do not hear him or see him or understand what is going on, I will try and claim his promises. I will press further into understanding him who has given me breath and life.

My challenge, then, for this year is to take what I have heard and allow it to penetrate my soul, to meditate on his word, to ask God to reveal himself to me and to show his glory in my life. Probably the biggest goal is to continue to realize just how much God loves me. Zephaniah 3:17 is a great reminder to me:

The Lord your God is with you,
he is mighty to save.
He will take great delight in you,
he will quiet you with his love,
he will rejoice over you with singing.

When it says rejoice over you with singing, it literally means, "spin wildly over you." How about this year we try to bask in the knowledge that God is wild about us and realize just how much he loves us despite the human longings of our hearts.

Kenny Warkentin (kennyp66@gmail.com) works full time as an urban missionary with Living Waters Canada and is an artist and musician. He lives in Winnipeg with his wife and daughter.

Distinguishing between truth and reality when reading the Bible

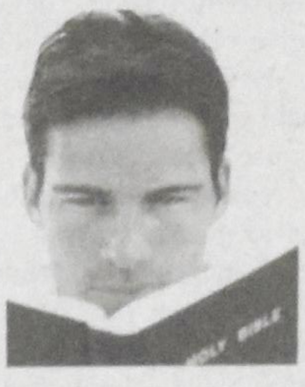
Gerry Gerrits

In recent months there has been considerable debate in the *Christian Courier* about the creation account in Genesis, and whether or not it ought to be given a literal interpretation. In reading Genesis chapter 1, one ought perhaps to keep in mind that at times there can be a distinction between truth and reality. These things are not identical at all times.

The parables as told by Christ to his followers convey certain truths, but in them Christ does not recount real situations and events. Can the creation account as found in Genesis be looked at in a similar manner? This is an issue that crops up from time to time, as it did in The Netherlands in 1924 when a Dutch pastor, Rev. Dr. J.G. Geelkerken, questioned, in a sermon, whether the serpent had actually spoken to Eve. The result was turmoil in the *Gereformeerde Kerk* for a number of years and in 1926 Geelkerken was dismissed by Synod which met in Assen that year.

One is inclined to wonder why a literal interpretation of Genesis 1 carries as much weight in some quarters as it does, while a similar interpretation does not appear to be applied to other passages or texts in the Bible. For example, what to do with Genesis 6:4, where we read: "In those days … the sons of the gods had intercourse with the daughters of men and got children by them" (New English Bible). This text is more than just a little reminiscent of Greek mythology. In the sixteenth century thousands of people were martyred, especially in the Low Countries, for rejecting the literal interpretation of Christ's words at the Last Supper: "This is my body … This is my blood." Ironically enough, the Catholic Church offered a sounder philosophical and theological position for the doctrine of transubstantiation than it did for many of its other teachings.

What must perhaps also be kept in mind is that while God first gave us his inspired Word many centuries ago, it has since then been handed down from generation to generation by fallible human beings. Errors crept into the text of the Bible as a result of mistranslations, and throughout the long Middle Ages (from about 500 AD to 1500 AD) many errors also crept into the text of Bible as a result of faulty transcription: i.e., copying by hand. For example, in the Middle Ages Moses was always portrayed with horns because of a mistranslation of Exodus 34:29 from Hebrew into Latin, and one of the last, if not the last, sculptors to portray Moses in such a fashion was the great Italian sculptor Michelangelo (1475-1564). The famous Dutch scholar, Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam (c. 1466-1535), published a new Greek edition of the New Testament from which he had eliminated most, if not all, errors that had crept in during the previous one thousand years or more. (Incidentally it was this new edition of the New Testament which Luther used, and it has been argued that without this 'cleaned up' edition of the New Testament he could not have arrived at the new theological insights which came to constitute the crux of the Protestant Reformation.) Since the sixteenth century biblical scholars and translators have continuously been searching for and employing the oldest and most reliable manuscripts that contain Bible texts, but the extent to which they correspond to the Biblical text as it was first written down will always remain somewhat of an open question. The Old Testament as we know it now dates from after the Babylonian Captivity.



In summary, by being caught up unduly in the interpretation of a particular text or chapter in the Bible, or in the debate about their reliability, one runs the risk of no longer being able to see the woods for the trees. We may do well to remember Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 13:12: "Now we see only puzzling reflections in a mirror, but then we shall see face to face." (New English Bible)

Gerry Gerrits is an emeritus professor in Acadia University's Department of History and Classics.

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Obituary

Janny Bonvanie (nee Wildeboer)

July 2, 1935 – January 2, 2012
Matthew 6: 25-34

Janny Bonvanie was called home to glory on January 2, 2012, in Brampton, surrounded by her three sons. She was predeceased by her husband Bernie.

She will be remembered by:
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Christopher & Lisa Colyn, Battle Creek, MI
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Jan 21 The Psalm Project concert: Light Korean Presbyterian Church, Mississauga at 7:30 p.m. Visit **thepsalmproject.com** or **worshipanew.net** for all tour dates and information or to listen to samples of **Psalms** or order CDs..

Jan 22 Worship with the The Psalm Project: Willowdale CRC at 10:00 a.m., Mountainview CRC (Grimsby) at 5:00 p.m.

Jan 23 The Psalm Project at Redeemer University College: Workshop at 11 a.m., Concert at 7:30 p.m.

Jan 24 The Psalm Project concert: First London CRC at 7:30 p.m.

Feb 17-19 Reformed Marriage Encounter Weekend. St. Catharines, ON Register at reformedme.org

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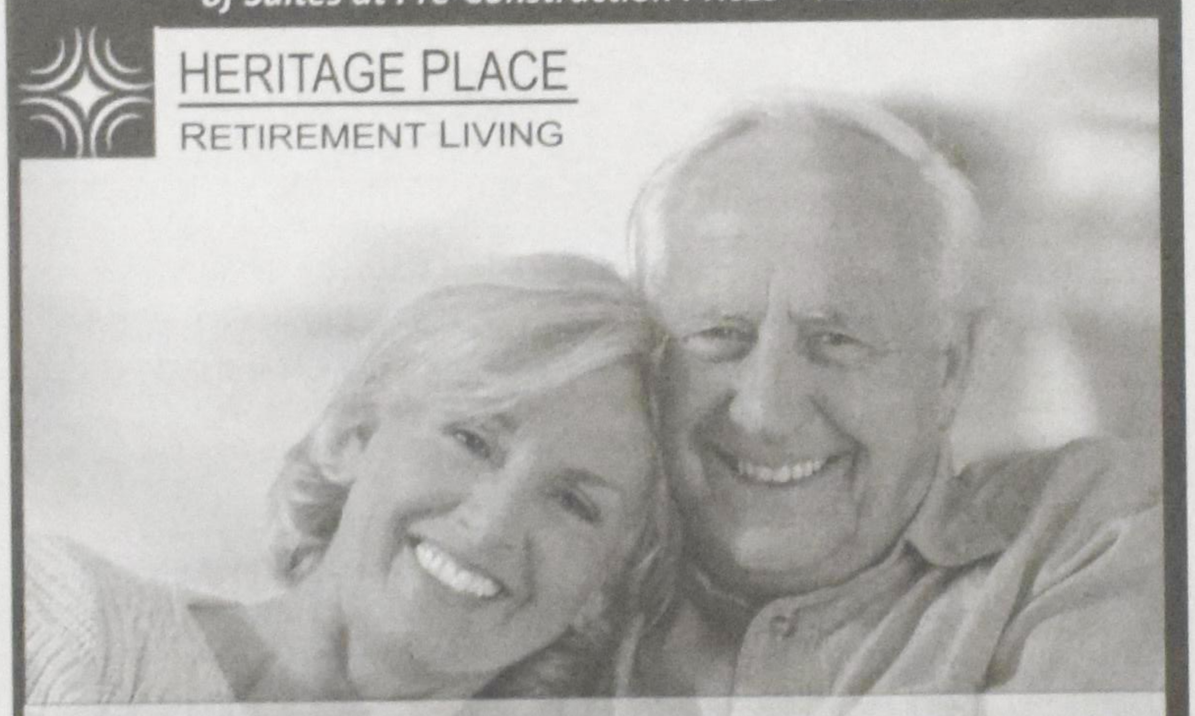

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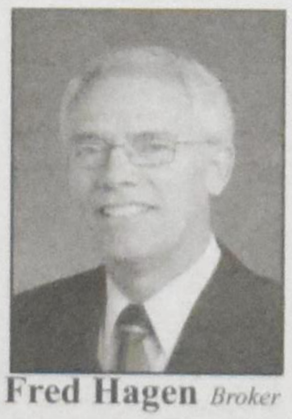

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The raw milk debate

Nathan Stevens

I have a confession to make: as a child I grew up on a dairy farm and drank raw milk every day with no ill effects. It may strike the average person as odd that while consuming raw milk on the farm is normal, if a farmer were to sell that raw milk to a neighbour they would be in violation of the Health Protection and Promotion Act. The fairness of this situation is at the heart of a battle that has been going on for nearly two decades in southern Ontario.

Michael Schmidt of Durham, Ontario is pushing the issue of raw milk production in Canada to the limit. The battle between Schmidt and the Ontario Ministry of Health has been ongoing since the 1990s, and was renewed in 2006. He is a firm believer in the positive qualities that raw milk has over pasteurized milk, and that people should have the freedom to choose whatever food product they wish to put into their bodies.

The most recent legal event in this on-going battle resulted in Schmidt being fined $9,150 and receiving one year of probation on 15 of 19 violations of the Health Protection and Promotion Act. This is a reversal of a previous acquittal, and Schmidt has filed for an appeal of this latest decision with the Ontario Court of Appeal.

Michael Schmidt: drinking illegally?

Why is there a demand for raw milk?

Schmidt's legal battles serve as a focal point in the wider discussion of raw milk's benefits and detriments. Proponents of raw milk have two main arguments regarding the quality of raw milk. First, they argue that pasteurization destroys some of the nutritional value that is to be found in raw milk. Second, while pasteurization may kill potentially harmful bacteria, it also kills potentially beneficial bacteria as well. In the view of proponents, the benefits of raw milk outweigh the potential health risks.

Why are there rules against consuming raw milk in Canada?

The pasteurization of raw milk was first introduced in the 1890s in the United States, and by the 1920s was heralded as a major breakthrough for managing public health. Urbanization required new systems to be developed to gather, process and distribute large supplies of food and to do it safely. The processor is the choke point in this process, which means that putting food safety measures in place at this stage makes systematic sense.

Health authorities warn that raw milk contains several dangerous bacteria such as salmonella, E. coli and listeria which can cause vomiting, diarrhea, kidney failure, miscarriage and even death. Since the process of pasteurization can remove this wide range of downsides, it is easy to understand why it is so widely used and accepted.

If consumers want raw milk, shouldn't the market exist in Canada?

Before considering whether raw milk should be allowed in Canada, a quick glance at a number of other countries will help frame the discussion. In the European Union, raw milk is legal and considered safe for human consumption, but individual member states are allowed to add special sanitary requirements and testing in order to address food safety concerns. France and Germany both allow raw milk products, and they are considered premium products. England requires product labels to provide a warning to consumers regarding the potential risks, and allows raw milk only as a direct to consumer product. In Australia raw milk sales are illegal, whereas it is allowed in neighbouring New Zealand.

In the United States, a little more than half the states do not prohibit the sale of raw milk, but the United States Department of Agriculture and the Centre for Disease Control both consider raw milk to be dangerous for human consumption. In fact, raw milk was responsible for 86 reported food poisoning outbreaks between 1998 and 2008, resulting in 1,676 illnesses, 191 hospitalizations and two deaths. Raw milk is responsible for nearly three times more hospitalizations than any other food-borne disease outbreak in America.

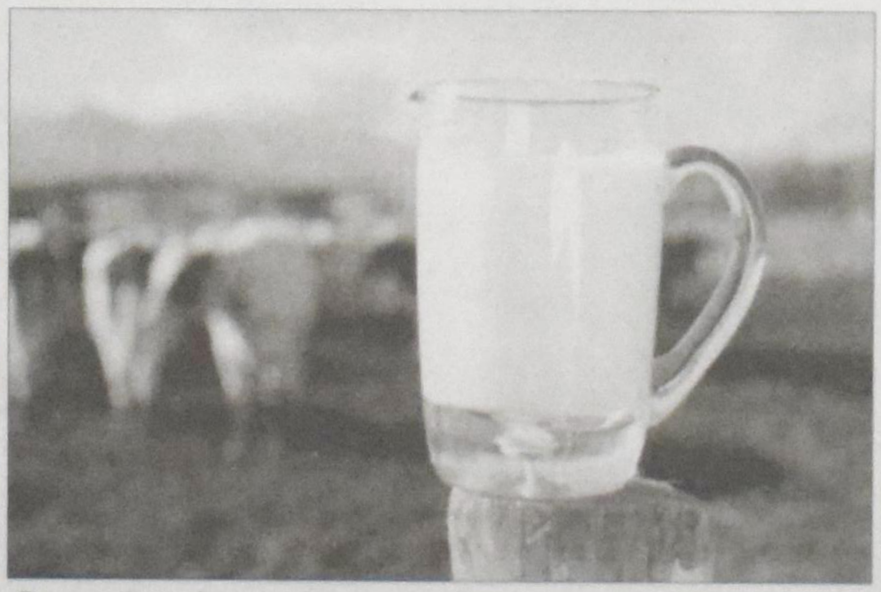
Focusing on Canada, then, raw milk advocates argue that people should have the choice to consume raw milk. Which raises a question: should consumers have the right to consume food that is considered to be dangerous in the view of the authorities? One major consideration here is that the rules surrounding sanitation on dairy farms have vastly improved since pasteurization was introduced a hundred years ago. The safety standards that can be achieved and measured reliably are far more advanced. It may be possible to reliably produce raw milk in an acceptably safe manner for consumers, and today might be the ideal time to re-examine the possibilities.

Adelaide Hunter Hoodless embarked on a campaign to have all milk pasteurized after her infant son died in 1889.

Finally, what are the implications for farmers if the status quo is maintained? For a few farmers, prohibitions against raw milk mean inability to access a potential market. However, the majority of dairy farmers benefit from the current rules which ensure that milk is safe. Many farmers want to avoid the risk of a bad news story involving the death of a child or elderly person due to milk consumption – raw or otherwise.

The raw milk debate in Ontario isn't over yet. There are examples of other jurisdictions where raw milk is consumed on a regular basis, but also examples where it isn't allowed. At the heart of the matter are the health concerns. If these very important concerns can be addressed in a satisfactory manner, then perhaps Canadians will have the option to consume raw milk in the future.

Nathan Stevens is the Research and Policy Advisor for the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario. The CFFO represents 4,200 farming families across the province.



Proponents of raw milk argue that pasteurization kills beneficial bacteria and destroys nutritional value.

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